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विषय संख्या ..... आगत नं० .....
लेखक .....
...क Meditation
.....

...सदस्य ...ंख्या	दिनाँक	सदस्य संख्या

गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय, हरिद्वार
कृपया पुस्तक के ऊपर कोई निशान आदि
न लगायें।

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पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय, हरिद्वार

वर्ग संख्या 294.53 आगत संख्या 6164
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Monks of the
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Publisher's Note

We have great pleasure in presenting to our readers the Indian edition of 'Meditation', a publication of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of London.

Written originally for non-Sanskrit knowing students of the West, this collection of writings by senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order avoids most of the technical terms usually found in Yoga and Vedantic works. It will therefore be found eminently readable by all. Many useful instructions are given here in lucid language on the techniques of stilling the waywardness of the mind and concentrating it upon the Reality within. We are sure that Indian readers also will find the book very helpful in their spiritual practice.

We are thankful to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, London, for kindly permitting us to bring out this Indian edition.

PUBLISHER

Sri Ramakrishna Math
Madras-600 004 (*India*)

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Only when the ripples have subsided and the water is calm, is it possible for us to catch a glimpse of the bottom.

Swami Vivekananda

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Preface

This book discusses methods of meditation as understood and practised by followers of the Vedanta philosophy, the age-old school of wisdom based on the Upanishads, the later portions of the Indian Vedas. In particular it presents meditation as taught by monastic disciples of those who sat at the feet of Shri Ramakrishna, who lived in Bengal from 1836 to 1886. As they show us, meditation is not so simple as some Eastern teachers appear to indicate; nor is it so difficult as Westerners sometimes suppose.

Swami Vivekananda, who was Ramakrishna's leading disciple, was the first to come to the West as the living embodiment of the message of renunciation and spiritual wisdom of the Vedanta. The teachings in the body of this book were given by Swamis, no longer living, who were the spiritual children of Swami Vivekananda and his brother-disciples. They were also pioneers of Vedanta in the West, taking up posts in the work started by him in Europe and America, long before 'yoga' and 'meditation' were household words there.

Most of the teachings were given first as lectures and informal discourses, and the reader will see how directly, in some cases, they are addressed to the circle of listeners. We have preserved this intimate style. Nearly all of the material appeared earlier in print, in *Vedanta for East and West*, a bimonthly journal which the London Centre publishes.

In the Introduction, meditation is put in perspective for us as regards its place in everyday life, and is seen as a system of checks and balances. Chapter One carries us on to the preparations required of those who wish to begin the art, and details ten points which will help us to establish right expectations and avoid misadventures. In the second chapter we find a clear exposition of the traditional Raja Yoga, the path to meditation according to Patanjali. Follow-

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ing this are the actual instructions in meditation, graded in such a way as to be useful both to the beginner and those who have already done some practice. In these and in the next section, which deals with *japa* and the significance of the *mantra*, the emphasis is on the Tantric method of meditation. Chapter Five brings together Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga, the path of philosophy to show us how concentration culminates in realization as the Advaitin understands it.

The practice of yoga in Vedanta includes various methods, and the reader will find here several strands: the early yogic meditations and the later Tantric, that which is based on non-dualistic knowledge, and that which is coloured by the moods of devotion. He will explore, and choose what suits his temperament.

A discussion of the important and popular topic of the guru has been appended. There is also a selection of translated Sanskrit passages which have been found suitable for leading group meditation.

Sanskrit words have generally been placed in italics and transliterated so as to indicate approximate pronunciation. A list of the more important Sanskrit words given with the diacritical marks will be found at the end of the book.

'Before You Sit in Meditation' first appeared in *Voice of India*, a journal published by the Vedanta Society of Northern California. The Centre wishes also to acknowledge its debt to Mrs. Mallika Clare Gupta, who originally provided the transcripts of the lectures in Chapter Three and to those devoted workers of the Centre and monastery who assisted with the innumerable and time-consuming preparations.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre
London
1972

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Biographical Notes

SWAMI BHAVYANANDA is Head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, London.

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA (1893-1969) was for the last thirty-seven years of his life Head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California. Born and educated in what is now Bangladesh, he became a school-teacher for a short period during which he endeavoured to put into practice Swami Vivekananda's principles of service to God in man, in a community of cobblers. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1920 and served chiefly as Editor of its magazine *Prabuddha Bharata*, distinguishing himself by his editorials, before being posted to San Francisco. There he revived the monastery, founded a convent, and started what are now the Vedanta Societies of Berkeley and Sacramento.

SWAMI GHANANANDA (1898-1969) was Founder and Head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of London, which he started in 1948 after having served in various capacities in the Order's centres in India, Ceylon, Mauritius and the United States. He also visited South Africa. He was born near Trivandrum in Kerala and when he had finished his study at college, where he was marked for his intellectuality and command of English, joined the Order in 1920. For twenty-one years Swami Ghanananda taught in London, in the Provinces and on the Continent. He founded the bimonthly *Vedanta for East and West* wrote many articles for it, and published three books. He was a potent influence in the lives of many students of Vedanta. He also founded a monastery. Shortly before his passing on he had retired.

SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA (1893-1937) was Founder and Head of the Vedanta Society of Chicago, illinois. A man of great personal charm, he was a powerful speaker and an inspiring musician as well. He brought out in Bengali a book of devotional songs which was the first of its kind in India. The present Bangladesh was the land of his birth and nurture, and on being graduated from college he joined the Order in 1917. The Swami was active in many fields of its work and in 1922 established a centre at Patna, where his selfless love for all endeared him to the populace. Having first served the Vedanta Society of New York for two years, he went to Chicago to found the centre. There he gave many lectures and published a volume of prayers and meditations, before his untimely death at forty-four years of age.

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INTRODUCTION

The Context of Meditation

Swami Bhavyananda

Before we begin a detailed study of the practice and theory of meditation, we must consider the context in which this pursuit is to take place. Success in meditation is closely related to peaceful living. For meditation to be fruitful, the mind must be calm, and if the mind is to be calm, we must conduct our normal life and activities in a peaceful way.

A prayerful attitude in relation to work is most helpful; whatever activity we may be involved in, we must practise awareness of the Divine Presence in every situation. You may say that this is difficult to do in the midst of occupations which require our full attention. Granted, but it is also a fact that as soon as a preoccupying activity is completed, we can return our mind to the Presence of God. And if we are honest, we will discover that many tasks do not require the full attention which we give them, thereby wasting much of our time. Just before and after sleep; while engaged in manual work, such as serving or cleaning; attending to some of our bodily needs—all these are times which we could transform into a kind of conscious prayer and remembrance of God. Introducing the act of remembering God into our daily occupations helps to prevent many a distracting thought seeking entrance to our mind. Many useless and

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sometimes damaging desires come up which can be easily stifled thereby.

By these methods the mind becomes tuned to the meditative mood; then when we sit for the practice of meditation at the appointed hours, it easily becomes stilled and concentrated. Disturbance from outside (in the form of sense-perceptions) or from inside (from the sub-conscious) can be easily turned aside. Thus may a regulated, deliberately planned, daily routine assist us in improving our interior life. One of the Desert Fathers records his reflections on the subject as follows: 'The Science of Sciences and the Art of Arts is the capacity to master harmful thoughts. The method and remedy against them is to watch with God's help for appearance of their suggestion and always to keep the thought pure. Just as we protect our physical eye, watching sharply for anything which might injure it and not letting even a speck of dust come near it, for attaining concentrated meditation on God, unrelenting watch over our daily thought-habits is essential—over our words, actions, thoughts, character and heart. This is what Shri Krishna tells us in Chapter VI of the *Bhagavad-Gita:*

> By such constant and steadfast application a person subdues the mind and attains the peace that resides in Me, the peace that passeth understanding.
>
> Yoga is not for him who eats too much nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him who sleeps too much or too little. For him who is temperate in food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, and temperate in sleep, yoga puts an end to all sorrows. (vs. 16-17)

Those who have been practising meditation are surely aware of how much effort has to be put into the process. It is the nature of the mind to flit from one perception to

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another, and it is truly difficult to place it where one wants it and to keep it restrained. Whether we care to admit it or not, the condition of the mind depends much upon the condition of the body. It will be no exaggeration to say that unless the latter is kept in a healthy and manageable condition, to steady the mind will be virtually impossible.

In the above verses we are told how to deal with the physical side of our organism so as to keep it in reasonably good shape. Food is essential for the upkeep of the body, but if the quantity is too much, or the quality too rich, our blood and energies will be kept at the stomach level only. Concentration of the blood supply at the stomach level drains it away from the brain and makes it dull. Over-eating and steady mental effort are poor companions. On the other hand, meditation is not possible for a starving man, and an undernourished brain can never make the fine discriminations required for spiritual life. Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'Religion is not for empty stomachs; first food and then religion.' To the hungry, God comes in the form of food.* Buddha, after passing through severe austerities, adopted and taught a moderate path as regards food. With respect to sleep, too much makes one dull and indulgent. There is an old saying, 'six hours for men, seven for women, eight for fools.' On the other hand, too much of keeping vigil may cause us to be sleepy throughout the day, endangering our work; or peevish and a source of irritation to others. Keeping regular hours of sleep reinvigorates and gives rest to the brain. Not only regulated food and sleep, but regulated recreation and work have their place in our normal everyday life; they are especially helpful in the pursuit of meditation, with which we aim to make spiritual progress. We must take advantage of all these aids and at the same time avoid all hindering obstacles.

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One who sits for meditation with such preparation of body and mind naturally gets his mind quickly calmed and steadied. Undistracted meditation becomes easy and natural. 'Like the flame of a candle, undisturbed by any breeze,' the *Gita* tells us in another place. The example has a special significance here. Mind, when concentrated on God, is intrinsically luminous. It is in that light that one perceives the all-pervading Reality. It is the Light of Knowledge: steady, bright and one-pointed.

Of what avail are prayer and *japa* (repetition of a holy name) in implementing our life of meditation? For those who believe in God both of these are very effective means of achieving mental concentration and experiencing the Divine Awareness. Prayer need not always take a formal expression; one can talk to God in a most direct way, opening one's heart to Him as one would do to a trusted friend. With no reservations and with no receptive barriers, one should converse with his Lord. Prayers to Him should be direct and issuing from the heart.

Jesus told his disciples that men ought always to pray. He himself was always in prayer. We often forget this. Prayer, for any spiritual-minded person, is no part-time occupation. For a man who has faith in God, all activities are prayers of a sort—walking, sitting, working, eating, playing. Such a man lives, like Brother Lawrence, in the presence of God, and his actions are offerings of prayer unto Him. In Christianity, various *mantras,* holy names and words, are used for *japa*. The name of Jesus itself is a *mantra*. The now familiar 'Jesus Prayer' of the Eastern Church, 'Lord Jesus Christ. have mercy on me,' is another. St. Francis used to sit up all night, saying 'My God and my All, my God and my All,' in ecstasy. Jesus constantly remembered his Heavenly Father. Without taking God's

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name—*Abba,* Father—he did not initiate undertakings. *Abba* was his last prayer at Gethsemane, his last word on the Cross. Repetition of a *mantra* should also be especially practised at fixed times by all spiritual aspirants.

In any system of meditation, prayer and *japa* have a very important part to play. Of course some persons may be able to concentrate their minds on the higher Self, even without *japa,* as Patanjali[1] tells us. Repetition of the holy name seems, however, to be a more suitable practice for many persons. Such aspirants, after preliminary preparations for meditation, can start with *japa* which is slightly sounded—a whisper. Later it will refine itself into a repetition done silently in the mind. As a result of continuous practice of the *mantra,* the mind becomes steady and concentrated, and ultimately we feel the presence of God. In that state there is only an awareness; no more self-effort in the form of concentration or *japa* is possible. One simply experiences the peace and joy of awareness of God. There will be then no consciousness of time or place. So we see what depth of spiritual experience can be reached by *japa.* Shri Krishna tells us '*yajnanam japayajno'smi',* 'of the sacrifices I am that of *japa.*'

Japa occupies an important place in the Vedantic tradition as well as in the Yoga system. A *mantra* is a holy name received either in vision or as the result of God-realization. Seers who have had such experiences are known as *mantra drashta,* literally, seers of *mantras.* Having obtained these *mantras,* they used them effectively in their lives, and passed them on to their disciples. These in turn transmitted them to succeeding generations. Thus these *mantras,* having become potent with long usage, have acted as the source of deep experiences to aspirants in the past and present.

1 *Yoga aphorisms,* I. 36 ff.

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No wonder we call them sacred. These *mantras* give direct access to God, rather as if we were to dial a person's telephone number. Those who take to this type of spiritual exercise find ample proof of this in their lives. When the word is presented by a competent teacher to a qualified student, a certain power passes into the latter, a power which is tangible and effective and about which (though it is personal and private) there is nothing mysterious.

Prayer—in which can be included reading, repeating and dwelling upon hymns and scriptures containing noble and elevating thoughts—helps very much to prepare our minds for *japa* and meditation. We find that in every religion prayers form a fundamental part of the literature. As an aspirant grows, spiritually, a prayerful attitude naturally develops in him, even if his outlook is basically monistic. So long as a man is aware of his human limitations, he cannot but pray to and worship a Personal God. Very few can feel strong and independent at *all* times. He is the only Power on whom we can unfailingly depend at every step; whenever *we* feel weak, God is the ready source of strength. In our moments of severe testing and turmoil, which no human being can altogether escape, God is the One Being to whom we can and should look for support.

But in our happy days, too, we are to offer our love and devotion to Him. He is our fair-weather Friend, as well. An Indian psalmist sings, 'O Mother, though I keep on forgetting You, You never forget me even once.'

Repeated and systematic practice is therefore necessary to calm the mind, which is very much accustomed to being propelled outwards. We find it difficult to resist this tendency, but we have to persist in spite of failure; success comes to the courageous and persistent. 'Purity, patience and perseverance,' says Swami Vivekananda, 'alone lead

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to success.' 'Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.' Our aim should be to combine positive progress, in the form of depth of experience, with 'holding action' in the form of regularity and non-procrastination. Most of us, as aspirants, believe that religious disciplines deepen and enrich our interior life. We set aside a part of the day for reading, meditating and devotional exercises. But we must occasionally assess our progress in order to take note of the divergence between what we are and what we would like to be; then we are to make more strenuous effort. Our mental activities need to be watched and directed diligently until, getting established in this habit, we become conscious of the process in the midst of our normal work, and take delight in it. In this way we may reach a creative pitch in our interior life where everything around us seems to move to our spiritual advantage. Somehow we meet the proper people, get suitable work, and find time for intense spiritual practice. Then a state of mental concentration becomes natural.

Although the Vedanta philosophy culminates in the doctrine of non-duality, the concept of a Personal God is very much in evidence in the Vedas. The *bhakti*-ideal is fully worked out by the Puranas and other later literature, and by the eminent historical figures we know as Divine Incarnations. The Hindu, being pre-eminently spiritual in his treatment of everything, raises also the *bhakti*-approach to the level of the Infinite, and makes it all-embracing. As a result he is able to sing the glories of the Atman and love of God with the same ecstasy. Says the *Amritabindu Upanishad,* 'In Him reside all beings, and He resides in all beings as their supporter. That all-pervading Deity am I (i.e., the Atman)'. Hindu prayers are usually sweet and devotional. In this tradition there is ample evidence that by prayer, song and symbol, properly used to advantage, aspirants

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can be lifted to the highest ecstasy, indeed to *samadhi*. Again in the *Gita*, Sixth Chapter, we read,

"That in which the mind, restrained by the practice of concentration, rests quiescent; that in which, seeing the Self through the self, one rejoices in one's own Self; that in which one knows the boundless joy beyond the reach of the senses, grasped only by the understanding; that in which being established, one never departs from Reality; that on gaining which one thinks there is no greater gain, and wherein established one is not moved even by the heaviest of sorrows: let that be known as yoga, severance from the contact of pain. It is to be practised with perseverance with an undaunted mind." (vs. 20-23)

The passage reminds me of a story which comes down to us from the era of Shri Chaitanya's disciples. There was an indigent brahmin whose wife was constantly nagging him to find more money for the household. She wanted better cloth, more food, the roof repaired etc. But this pious man was just not able to find any way in which he could scrape up more income. One day they noticed that a holy man of some repute had come into the village, and was living nearby, where people sometimes came to him for one reason or another. 'Why don't you go and ask that saint to give you something to make us prosper? He must have some yoga powers or something, and other people are going there. . .' urged his wife.

'Oh, how can I do that?' said her husband, his head beginning to hang in shame. 'A *sadhu* should be appproached for gifts of wisdom, devotion of heart, and the like.' But his wife kept after him till at last one day the brahmin lost sufficient pride to go and seat himself beside the *sadhu*. For some time he could not open his mouth.

'Yes, friend,' said the holy man at last, 'what is it you

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have come for? You must have some request in mind, no doubt.' 'Sir,' said the brahmin, 'my wife believes that you are a worker of miracles. Tell us, do you not have one of those magic touchstones, owning which a man can change all he possesses into gold? I have come to beg that of you.' And he bit his lip.

'Oh,' replied the other, 'is that all? Why, I threw away one of those yesterday; it is just in the ditch over there. Perhaps you can go and pick it up.' Sure enough, the poor man, searching in the ditch discovered an oddly shaped and coloured stone, which he rightly judged to be the touchstone. Sitting down again beside the saint he gazed at it wonderingly. Then he studied the saint and pondered awhile. 'You threw this away!' he exclaimed. 'But then you must have something which is more valuable. Give me that.' 'I have indeed,' replied the other, 'and that is the holy Name. I will give it to you; but as your wife still has some desires, she is not ready; so go to her and give her the touchstone.' The brahmin did as he was bidden, renounced his home and came back to learn the pursuit of Pure Gold.

'Severance from the contact of pain'. What does it precisely mean? That the yogi is callous and indifferent? No. He does not experience pain because of the preoccupation of his mind elsewhere. His reactions to impulses from the outside world, as well as the 'inside world' of his own organism, are now very much controlled. His purified calm mind is busy perceiving his real nature, i.e., joy. This joy is independent of the outside world. It is intrinsic joy and delight, and because it is supersensuous and transcendent, it remains steady and unvarying. This state could well be called a luminous awareness of unconditioned joy. Such is the essence of the yogi's real nature. He has turned his vision inward, and is in a state of superconscious cognition and bliss.

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This joy is rightly conceived by Vedanta to be the cognition of that very Self which is described as *Sa-chit-ananda,* Pure Being, Consciousness, Bliss. What can be more joyful than partaking of and perceiving one's own divine nature? What work can be greater or more important than experiencing this joy, free from the pangs of pain—or pleasure—of this phenomenal world?

On reaching that state, we are told, we shall clearly see that there was nothing in this world worth pursuing. While we have not yet known the dawn of that awareness, many things, many 'causes' in life, appear to be worthy of our pursuit. So long as we feel this way, we must go on with our search; but let us not get stuck at the lower levels of satisfaction; let us 'move on' as Shri Ramakrishna used to urge his disciples. Like the monk in the story of the touchstone, we gradually put all our faith into that which is of the highest value. If anyone asks us, 'What is it that you have obtained, that you can throw away these valuable objects?', let us be able to give an unequivocal response. When we are still on the path, joys and sorrows do continue to affect us; but once we understand the nature of the world and our goal in it, we can come more often and more easily into the state of true stability. Even while struggling we have the advantage of knowing where we are going. Later, we reach the stage where nothing can disturb or upset us. This must be our aim.

In the pages which follow, senior members of the Ramakrishna Order have given many suggestions and instructions designed to help us reach that state. Their guidance is based on experience with the struggles of aspirants who came to them. It is our hope that the ever-widening circle of those who are attracted to the practice of meditation will find these clear teachings a compass and a beacon-light.

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CHAPTER 1

Before You Sit in Meditation

Swami Ashokananda

I believe that through meditation, which is the uninterrupted flow of the same thought of God, one can easily attain the Highest, for the mind eventually succumbs to a thought to which it is subjected uninterruptedly for a long time. If we continue to imbue the mind with a certain kind of consciousness—whatever may be the condition of mind in the beginning, whether spiritual or not, whether filled with love for God or with restless desires—in course of time the desired change will take place.

Shri Ramakrishna laid much stress on this fact. It took me a long time to comprehend one of his teachings on this subject, but when I understood it—and I hope I have understood it—I found great promise and assurance therein. He used to say that the mind is like a laundered cloth which takes the colour of the dye in which it is dipped. At first I thought he meant that the mind must be made absolutely pure, before it is plunged into the thought of God to take His colour. There was nothing particularly encouraging in this, because the great problem of almost all spiritual aspirants is the attainment of purity of mind. Such purification is three-fourths of the battle; for when it is fully accomplished, spiritual realization comes spontaneously. But as I pondered over Shri Ramakrishna's simile, I began to under-

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stand it differently. In likening the mind to a laundered cloth, he spoke of the average mind, the mind which is so crowded with worldly and contradictory thoughts and feelings, and which is so averse to the thought of God. It was not the purified mind that he likened to a laundered cloth, but the mind in whatever condition it may be. I saw he meant that even this average mind, if dipped in the thought of God, would take on spiritual colour.

Here is a psychological truth, wonderfully encouraging and helpful but often forgotten by spiritual aspirants. Once a man came to Shri Ramakrishna, saying, 'I cannot control my mind—I don't know how'. The Master, astonished, said, 'Why do you not practise *abhyasa-yoga?*' Bringing the mind back again and again to the thought of God—that is what *abhyasa-yoga* means. This practice is particularly commended in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Does it matter very much if the mind wanders in the beginning, so long as you bring it back to Him? If we could remember this, half the battle would be already won, but unfortunately we often do not, and then we think of other things and completely forget the spiritual quest. Such being the case, I may profitably discuss certain points concerned with the means of self-control and meditation.

What is the condition of mind suitable for meditation? It is known to all of you, I think, as quietness. This is not a forced calmness, but a calmness resulting from the cessation of most of the strong desires. The things which disturb the mind, whether rising from within or coming from without, are connected with our secret, basic desires. We are always trying to realize certain ends. Though we strive desperately, we often fail, and failure exasperates the mind. Even when success is ours, there are strange results. Because the objects of our desires sometimes elude us while we are enjoying

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them, we feel disappointed and cheated; and when we are not thus frustrated, we become attached to the objects of enjoyment, in which case, since enjoyment cannot be continually intensified, satiety follows. All these reactions keep the mind continually restless, whether pleasantly or unpleasantly. Thus we find that the thoughts which do not allow our mind to dwell on the Presence of God are connected with the objects of our desires; and that only when we succeed in ridding ourselves of our predominant desires, does the mind become comparatively quiet.

We call this state of relative calmness the beginning of *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the mind), a condition in which the mind, though sometimes restless, is at other times quiet—restless when it comes in contact with the objects of desire, but otherwise fairly quiet. This is a very favourable state. If you find that your mind is naturally quiet when you are not in actual contact with disturbing things, that you like to be alone and that you have a feeling of serenity, recognize this condition as most desirable. In this condition you should try your best to practise meditation; you should never neglect it. The mind is a very changeable entity. Do not think that any desired condition will continue to exist simply because you have once reached it. Something may arise from within or come from without to distract you, and it may sometimes take five or even ten years for the mind to quiet down again, just as the sea takes days to regain calmness after a storm.

I do not mean that we shall never be absolutely safe. Undoubtedly there is a mental condition in which one need have no fear at all, but that is a very high state. When a person has reached that one-pointed state, he has burned his bridges behind him: he has reached a condition in which the things of this world can no longer attract him; his mind

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will never hark back to the world he has left behind. He is secure.

Suppose we have reached the state in which the mind, though at times restless, is at other times quiet. What shall we do then, if we want to succeed in meditation?

(1) We must at the beginning make a firm resolution to be very regular in our practice. We always manage to attend to our urgent bodily needs whatever may be going on; we should be equally faithful to the practice of meditation. Meditation should be as much a part of life as breathing. In my country, when a person is very busy he says, 'I have no time to breathe'. Actually, however, he does breathe. And so it should be with meditation. Though at first the desire to practise it may appear artificial, make up your mind; say to yourself, 'I must meditate'.

Shri Ramakrishna often praised the Muslims for their punctuality in prayer. Wherever a Muslim may be, when the time for prayer comes, he stops everything, washes his hands and face, and then spreading his rug even by a roadside if necessary, prays for at least fifteen minutes. Never does he fail to do this. There is no justification for anyone to say that he has no time to meditate. Extraordinary occasions may arise when one actually has not the time. But to say, 'I am too busy to find time for it', or 'I am so tired in the evening that it is impossible to meditate', is mere evasion. Nothing prevents the one who thus rationalizes from saving some of his energy for the evening. But he spends it all in the daytime doing other things—sometimes actually harmful things—and when evening comes, he gives himself false justification for failing to meditate. Ask him about it and he will say, 'I need more sleep; I am tired. When I get up I must hurry to the office—where is the time?'

We have a song about a man who, after spending all

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his life foolishly, finally realized his mistake and said, 'I had time for everything else, O Lord, but I did not have time to think of Thee!' Notice this peculiarity of the human mind: there is a time and a place for everything else in our life, but we do not have even fifteen minutes daily for meditation! If you tell me you have no time or energy, do you think I shall believe you? I shall say, you are deceiving yourself. Where there's a will there's a way. If you are determined, you can always find time to meditate.

Here I should like to make a suggestion, for I know that discouragement comes. Sometimes in meditation the mind behaves wonderfully; it becomes calm and concentrated easily, and you are encouraged. But if at other times it behaves badly, refuses badly, refuses to quiet down, and is restless with all kinds of thoughts, you may be tempted to say, 'No use for me to meditate. I try, but reach nowhere.' I want to tell you this: unless you are born with wonderful qualities of mind and in a very advanced state of spiritual development, you are subject, like every other man who has tried to become spiritual, to these fluctuations of consciousness. Do not let them discourage you, and do not think you are not fit to meditate when your mind is not sufficiently spiritual. Some have asked, 'How can I approach God with a low state of mind?' If you were cold, would you say, 'I am cold, so let me get warm before approaching the fire'? Or would you say, 'I am cold and therefore the first thing to do is to go to the fire and warm myself'? If you feel yourself lacking in spirituality, that is the time of all times to think of God.

Do not let your mind mislead you. The mind can trick you in many different ways: sometimes it will tempt directly, and again it will mislead in the very name of religion. This reluctance to meditate because you are 'not spiritual

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enough' is a trick the mind plays on you. Whatever your mental condition, even if your mind be filled with low thoughts, try to think about God. Of course, you may not be able to think about Him or meditate on Him as you would wish, but what does it matter? Keep trying. A vicious horse kicks, rears and attempts to throw the rider, but if the rider manages to stay firmly in the saddle, the horse quiets down, knowing it has found its master. The mind behaves in the same way. It will try to dislodge you, but upon finding that you cannot be shaken off, it will become your slave. That is the secret of the mind, so do not bother about its condition. Make the determintion to ride it, and this determination, which implies concentration is itself a victory.

(2) Next, you must have a fixed time for meditation. In my opinion a person should meditate not less than twice a day. If you cannot meditate twice, meditate at least once, either in the morning or in the evening.

In India we think there are four auspicious hours for meditation: early morning—at least an hour before sunrise, while it is still dark—is a very good time. Of this, more later. The second auspicious hour is noon. I do not know whether any special advantage can be derived from it in the city, but undoubtedly in villages, especially in a tropical country, all is hushed at this time and nature seems to stand still. It is so hot that even birds are silent and hide themselves among the leaves of the trees. People are quiet—often they rest at that time—and there is a definite lull; at least I used to feel it in my country, where many use the noon hour for meditation and worship.

The third auspicious time for meditation is early evening. In this country it is unfortunately difficult to meditate then, because it is usually the dinner hour. Yet evening is certainly one of the best times in which to meditate. If you can, you

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may practise meditation shortly before dinner, but it is not advisable to meditate immediately thereafter, as digestion may be impaired and your health affected.

The fourth hour is midnight. In this part of the world it is not very quiet even at twelve o'clock; yet I think one does find a certain stillness. Where it is fairly quiet, midnight is wonderfully suitable. As a matter of fact, many believe that midnight is the best of all hours for meditation.

Morning meditation has a certain advantage over evening meditation, in that the mind is quiet when you waken from the night's rest. All the impressions of the preceding day are erased, as if someone had come after school and wiped the black-board clean. Then too, nature is quiet in the early morning and the city is not yet fully awake and stirring. Consequently, you find it easier to quiet the mind. There is another advantage: by meditating before the day has begun you give a spiritual impetus and direction to the mind. Though it may tend to lose some of the spiritual strength and enthusiasm as the day progresses, these will nevertheless remain for many hours and sustain you through most of the day.

I should mention here that some may find meditation more successful in the evening than in the morning. There are those who 'wake up' gradually as the day advances. In the morning they are only half-awake, but towards evening wide awake with clear, sharp minds behaving wonderfully. Such persons undoubtedly will find evening or night meditation more successful.

If you cannot avail yourself of any of these hours which are especially suitable for meditation, you should choose the one most convenient to you and make every effort to stick to it. The observance of regular hours of meditation is very important, because the mind functions according

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to habit. If it is made to think and feel in a certain way at a given time for many days consecutively, it will spontaneously think and feel in the same way whenever that time arrives. If we meditate on God at a specified hour, whenever that hour approaches, our mind, without any effort on our part, will be filled with the consciousness of God. This is no mean advantage to derive from regularity of practice.

(3) Just as you should have regular hours of meditation, so should you have a fixed place in which to meditate. That is one great advantage of temples and churches. Since such places are used for thinking of God, the very air in them becomes charged with His presence and the feeling of purity. You are uplifted merely by going there.

An atmosphere similar to that of temple or church can be created even in a corner of your own room. For wherever an intense thought is held uninterruptedly, the place becomes charged with the quality of it. Probably this is because the material atmosphere and surroundings are connected with the body, which vibrates in accordance with the thoughts of the mind. If our thoughts are pure, our bodies likewise attain to a purity which may be called a spiritual vibration; and naturally, with such a change in the body, the outside atmosphere is also changed. Thus the fixed place where you meditate will become charged with energy; it will be so permeated with a spiritual quality that your mind will be filled with the thought of meditation as soon as you come to that place. It will be quieted as if by a magic touch, and you will be conscious of a palpable Presence. What a great advantage! You can indeed perform this seeming miracle through the one practice of keeping apart a certain place consecrated to thoughts of God.

(4) When we measure the strength of the subtle enemies which hide in our minds—the passions, impulses, greeds and

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desires—these devices that I have prescribed seem to provide a very frail protection. I admit this. When I say 'hide', I mean that even the very best of us have not completely escaped their influence. It is said that one is not wholly free of them until he has actually touched the feet of God.

Just as in winter the garden is cleared of weeds and old growth but with the first rain of spring the tiny seeds left lying in the earth sprout to cover it with green, even so, many subtle thoughts, impressions and desires lie hidden in our minds, waiting to spring up at the first opportunity. Therefore we must be very careful. We know that all these wrong impulses are in our minds and that they would easily cover our whole consciousness, if we did not restrain them. Our problem is to keep a great part of our mind—and by degrees a greater and yet greater part of it—free from the domination of wrong impulses and desires, so that with the mind thus freed we can think about God.

In the meantime, what should we do to conquer our desires and adverse impulses? Sometimes they succumb to direct attack, but a flank attack is usually better. Fighting a state of mind directly in order to conquer it can do more harm than good, for thereby the mind often becomes more and more entangled. The wiser course is not to allow oneself to dwell on the condition of mind to be eradicated. Remember this psychological fact: the more you dwell on a mental condition, the more it is strengthened.

There is a story of a monk who used to sit under a roadside tree to pray and meditate. A woman of ill repute often passed by, and he would say to her, 'You should give up your evil ways and try to be good. If you do not, terrible things will happen to you after death'. Every time the monk saw the woman, he admonished her similarly. In course of time they both died, and the messengers of death

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came to claim their spirits. It is said that a bright messenger brings a golden chariot to carry a good person to heaven, whereas a dark messenger comes when an evil person dies. It happened that the dark messenger came for the monk and the celestial messenger for the woman.

The monk was astonished. 'I think there has been a mistake,' he said. 'No,' answered the messenger, 'there has been no mistake. All is quite right.' 'How can that be?' asked the monk. The messenger replied gravely, 'Though seeming to meditate, you were all the while thinking of the woman and her evil deeds. Did not your mind dwell continually on evil? But the woman asked God for help, saying, "Lord, I am weak. Save me!" Did not her mind dwell on God more than yours?' The monk could make no answer.

This may be an extreme illustration, but it contains a deep psychological truth. It points to a fundamental fact concerning mental action, a fact that you can utilize in your own struggle for self-conquest. When the mind is allowed to dwell on some undesirable quality, it certainly creates a new impression that is many times stronger than the original one. Further recognition of this quality will only make it stronger and stronger until it may even become a complex.

I am not saying that you should not restrain your mind, that you should let it be uncontrolled, or as it is called, 'natural'. Nor do I mean that you should ignore your weaknesses. But truly it is often safer not to grapple with these directly. The better strategy is to train the mind to dwell on a new level. First divert it from the thought of your weakness to some innocent and pleasing subject; then lift it by degrees to a higher consciousness. This method of self-restraint does not repress the mind, but rather lifts it from dangerous associations by substituting desirable for undesirable thoughts.

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If at present you have some serious fault that seems almost impossible to eradicate, you must have lent it strength and support by thinking of it and indulging in it. Take away that support, and the fault will become weak and will finally die through lack of nourishment. I do not say that this is easy to do, but with practice you can form the habit, and it is a sure way of making spiritual progress. After starving your undesirable thoughts for some time, you will probably find that, while many of them have died, some have remained. Do not be too concerned. Let them remain, so long as they do not gain strength. Keep them cornered, and eventually they also will die.

(5) Bad company is one of the most potent causes of mental conflict and disturbance. It would be very well to mix with all kinds of people, if we could remain unaffected by their company; but this rarely happens. I do not know of anyone who can do it. Right contacts and associations are therefore very important in spiritual life. If you share the company of impure persons and are in frequent contact with wrong things, you will be unable to keep under control the thoughts you are trying to check; they will grow and will finally overcome your mind completely.

(6) A certain amount of asceticism is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Some of you, not eager to meditate, may say, 'We shall leave that for our next life,' or 'We shall take it up a few years hence'. Many think that youth is the time to enjoy life, that it is well enough to practise religion after beginning to grow old. In other words, when the world has turned sour, they will go to church wearing a long face and think they have religion. That is not and cannot be religion.

What do we bring to God in such a case? A worn-out body and a worn-out mind, scarred through and through.

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Do you think He is pleased with these ? We do not take worm-eaten fruits or wilted flowers to His altar, but perfect offerings. In the same way, we should give Him the best of ourselves. The offering of a fresh and pure mind pleases Him most. Those who think religion is exclusively for the old make a profound mistake. The young especially should try to be spiritual, for if religious life begins early and the practices I have mentioned are undertaken while the mind is still fresh and pure, then by keeping a close watch over the mind one can keep it unspoiled. Under no circumstances should we allow the mind to become affected by the world. Youth is the propitious time for setting to work.

Shri Ramakrishna once said to a young college student: 'When a man makes a brick, he puts his trade mark on it while it is still soft. Then, when the brick is dried in the sun and baked in the kiln, the mark becomes permanent. Even so, if you can put the imprint of God on your mind while it is soft, the imprint can never be effaced, but will remain forever.'

Practise asceticism—the more the better; and this does not mean making wry faces as if you have bitten into a sour apple. Practising asceticism should give a pleasure similar to that of riding a spirited horse. Gain the strength to control the forces of your body and mind so that you are not dominated by them. This asceticism is necessay, for without it meditation is impossible.

(7) All the things I have discussed so far are important preliminaries; they should be practised each day of our lives and not merely at the beginning of our spiritual quest. He who practises them rightly can at will withdraw his mind completely, because he has gained tremendous control over it. But until you have been fully established in these practices many of you may find that during meditation the mind takes

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some time to reach a state of quietude. This fact should be given careful consideration. If you rush about doing and thinking many things before meditation, what success can you expect?

For some time prior to meditation you should try to be quiet and to feel that you are unrelated to the world, that you have nothing to do with it. As husband, wife mother, father, child and so on, you have many duties, and there are a thousand things demanding your attention. When approaching God, do you know what you should do? You should go to Him as though the world had never existed for you, as if you had no husband, wife, parents, friends, country—nothing at all. This would be the right feeling in the hour of meditation.

Approach meditation with the feeling of eternity. Who succeeds best in meditation? He who at the time of meditation can feel absolutely unrelated. Do you understand what that means? Try to imagine what eternity is. It is beyond time and consequently beyond all phenomena; it is a condition—if we may call it so—in which none of these relative things exist. When seeking to think of the eternal Lord, you are making an effort for the time being to go beyond all relationships. You must say, 'I have no body, no mind. Time and space have disappeared. The whole universe has vanished. God alone is.' Then only will the mind have that subtle perception which will enable it to feel God's gracious presence. Thus, before you enter the place of meditation, you must leave everything relative outside.

In our monasteries the monks who are very strict do not allow visitors to speak of their wives, husbands or children, or about worldly things, however important. It is not that they discountenance a person's doing his duty, but that they know that the mind in order to be spiritual must partake

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of the character of the eternal. There must indeed be some time during the day when you feel absolutely unrelated—because to be so is your true nature. Though you seem to be related to people, you know these relationships are impermanent. Your true natue is unrelated, and it is in the unrelated condition that you must enter into meditation.

(8) By fulfilling the conditions which I have specified, real and appreciable spiritual progress can be made. But here I must tell you that all spiritual practices, including meditation, depend upon one thing: a great yearning for Truth. Have you that yearning? You may say, 'I do not feel it. What then, is the use of meditation?' But is it impossible to create that feeling? The mind's appetite for God can be stimulated deliberately. When by whatever means the mind is made to yearn for Him, the feeling is no less real than if it had come spontaneously. If you wait for time to bring a natural longing, it may never come. Since this longing is essential, create it. At first your mind will fluctuate. But do not be discouraged by these unstable moods of the mind, and above all do not let yourself be defeated.

Suppose that you are a boy and that another boy in the neighbourhood always tries to browbeat you. He has no right to do it, and you know him to be actually a coward. What is the proper course to take? Will you submit to the bully, thinking that you are naturally weak and that to fight him is useless? No. you will deliberately call up the feeling of manliness within you. You will say to yourself, 'I refuse to be bullied by him.' The next time you confront him, that feeling may partially decline, but you will nevertheless manage to look him in the eye, and you will eventually be brave enough to challenge him. You will have become manly and you will say, 'This is my true nature; I am really strong!'

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We are acting similarly at every moment. In acquiring a skill or gaining knowledge in school or college, we succeed by repeated effort. At first, what we are trying to acquire is not natural to us, but once mastered, it appears an essential part of ourselves. This is even more true in spiritual life, and we must exert ourselves accordingly. At first everything seems difficult, and you say, 'What actually is my nature? Maybe I am just not religious. Perhaps I am not destined to be spiritual'. There were times when I too thought the same. I would consider a certain obstruction too great for me and its removal an impossibility. Then I would remind myself that I was not really the body and mind, but the spirit; that the realization of my spiritual self was my destiny. I knew that if I did not conquer the obstruction then, I was just postponing the task for the future. Why not act at once and finish it? I can truly say, my good fortune lay in holding to this thought. True, I was sometimes tempted to give up the struggle, but then I would think, 'I cannot escape my spiritual destiny. Let me therefore realize it now!'

Great longing and faith are very important in the practice of meditation, for without intense desire for God and faith in Him meditation proves half-hearted and sterile. Where there is no interest in what you are doing, it becomes a mere formality, and effort is soon abandoned.

If you believe in a personal God, pray to Him. By 'personal God' I do not mean God with a body, but God with self-consciousness, who is our Father, Mother, Friend and Lord, who is the all-pervading Creator of the universe. He listens when we pray to Him; we can approach Him in full confidence, just as children approach their parents. Believing in a personal God and loving Him will make it very easy for you to meditate. Dwell on the thought of Him more and more. Do things for Him. Success in spiri-

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tual life lies in concentrating every thought, every feeling, every ounce of energy on God.

(9) How will you do it? When you speak, speak of God. When you walk, go to His temple. When you work with your hands, do something in His service. Every function of body and mind must somehow be directed towards Him. If you have to go to an office instead of a temple, make your office the temple of God! If your work is honest, it can be done. If it is dishonest, change that work. If changing means even facing starvation, then face it!

Courage!—that is always necessary. Do not forget this: He who created the world is still behind it and will never let us starve. If we really want the Truth and hence are willing to discard whatever is wrong and untrue, we shall never lose by following the Truth. It is not that things will happen just as we wish. but they will happen with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of benefit.

If your occupation is honest, you can certainly conceive it as a work for God. Whether you are at a desk or doing housework, whatever the nature of your work, meditate on God. Offer to Him what you have done through the day, though it was apparently done for your employer. Have you typed twenty letters and taken them to him? Let him sign them, but afterwards close your eyes and offer all to the Lord. You will thus give a new turn to your thoughts. Yes, it is a different way of doing things. It may appear a little unusual at first, but undertake it anyhow. Little by little a deeper meaning will be revealed, and, you will find that this practice is not what you originally thought it to be; it will become tremendously effective.

In this way, whenever we do anything for others or for ourselves, we may think we are doing it for the Lord. Everything in life can then be converted into spiritual activity.

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There may be some who are able, consciously and deliberately, to do things directly for God. How fortunate they are! That is why people perform elaborate worship. That is why they grow flowers and offer them on the altar, why they burn incense and light candles. Perhaps you do not like such practices? But how else would you spend the hours of the day? Don't you see that time and energy are wasted by serving the little self? Would it not be better to offer to Him whatever you do? Out of this feeling has come ritualism. Out of this feeling temples, where people bring offerings for worship, have been built all over the world.

However, I am not insisting that all should practise ritualism. Each must worship according to his spiritual temperament. But in some manner you will have to discover how to bring your own thoughts, emotions and actions to the service of the Lord. The more you do it, the closer you will be to Him. Then, when you sit in meditation, everything else will be forgotten, and God alone will fill your heart.

(10) Perhaps you are accustomed to convince yourself of the reality of spiritual truths by means of reasoning. But until you have experienced these truths yourself, let me say that the greatest blessing would be for you to meet one who has realized them. The proof of spiritual truths does not lie in reason, argument or any kind of outward demonstration. Their proof lies in the sincere conviction carried by the words of a man who has realized what he expresses. Though others may disagree, I think that this is the one objective proof on which one can rely.

If such an illumined person were to say to me, 'My son, you are not really this body and mind; spirit is your true nature, the immortal and eternal being is the real you. Passing things do not belong to you. Try to penetrate the

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depths, try to realize your true Self,' I should be forced to accept and to act upon his words. As he spoke, something in his voice would sink deep into my heart; I should not be able to resist it. How I wish you could all find someone from whose lips such words would fall! You would not then be able to doubt or ignore them, and conviction of your true nature and glorious goal would grow within you. For a time, failure might cause you to despair, but eventually you would say, 'All right, let me try again'. And you would win.

I have now told you what should be done preparatory to meditation. Your mind can be drawn ever closer to God by undertaking all the various measures I have enumerated. In conclusion, let me stress a few points: Do whatever work is required of you, but direct it to the Lord; then your mind will not be disturbed. Be unrelated. Identify yourself with eternity, then meditation will be very easy. Do not let your mind wander, or worldly thoughts will enter and cloud it—this should never be permitted. Before you sit in meditation, think of the things I have suggested.

When nothing extraneous enters your mind, it will grow calm. Then, in the temple of your heart, you will begin to see the shining face of the Lord. Meditating upon it you will find it more and more beautiful, and plunged in its infinite beauty, you will forget all else. You will at last be wholly abosrbed in Him.

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CHAPTER 2

The Yoga of Concentration

Swami Ghanananda

The Vedas speak of *shravana,* hearing the truth, preferably through the living voice, not simply through books; secondly, *manana,* reflecting upon the truth; and thirdly, *nididhyasana,* which is meditation. Meditation is only the intense form of thought upon God. Of course, one can meditate on many subjects, say geometry, nuclear fission, science and so on; but here we always use this word *nididhyasana* for intense thought upon God.

Now, you find that in all religions, the attempt is made to converge the mind on God. on Reality. When a man thinks about something, he approaches the object of his thought; then comes the stage when the object enters his heart, his mind and his very soul; and thirdly, perhaps he reaches a certain sense of identity with the object. All these are applicable also to spiritual contemplation. First, there is the stage at which we feel God is close to us and we are close to God; then comes the second stage in which we feel that God is in us and we are in God; and very few come to the final stage, as it is called, the summit of spiritual thinking and experience, the very peak of it, namely, God is I and I am God. In this sense of identity, man completely forgets the

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body. He forgets that he is a living thing, an entity, and is merged in pure Being. In other words, it is man's uttermost humility that brings about this state of union with God.

We often hear the complaint from those who have tried meditation, that after some minutes the mind begins to wander. They sit for meditation and then find that after eight or ten minutes the mind begins to wander. They are not able to sit still and, since the body is disturbed, the mind is disturbed too. Then the aspirant leaves the seat of meditation saying that he is not able to concentrate. There are certain preliminaries which you should observe before practising meditation, and if you miss them, you often cannot concentrate. A great scientist in Yoga, namely Patanjali, who in my opinion was a contemporary of Buddha, has given us a number of instructions which are preliminry to concentration. They are included in the eight steps which constitute the course of training called Raja Yoga.

The first step is *yama,* which consists of the practices of non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-receiving of gifts. The idea behind the last practice is that the mind of the person who receives gifts is acted on by the mind of the giver. Receiving gifts is apt to destroy the aspirant's independence by putting him under obligation to the giver. Patanjali is here, as elsewhere, stating the science of the matter. Whether all the conditions for the successful practice of Raja Yoga can be carried out, depends on the circumstances and capacity of the aspirant. Gifts that are tokens of genuine affection can, generally speaking, be regarded as more or less harmless.

The second step is *niyama,* consisting of the practices of cleanliness of body and purity of mind, contentment, austerity without going to extremes or weakening the body

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and mind, study of spiritual wisdom, and devotion to God. Contentment means contented acceptance of one's lot in life, untroubled by envy or restlessness. It does not mean that one should be contented with the lot of people who are in unfortunate circumstances.

Then comes *asana* or posture. In this country Yoga is largely identified with those exercises that are known as Hatha Yoga. Patanjali speaks only of a posture which is easy yet firm. From that single and simple direction of his were elaborated a number of exercises which people began to practise in India, and these have now gone all over the world. Patanjali was concerned only with the posture for meditation. It should be easy and steady, so that you can sit and meditate for at least half-an-hour in the beginning, and later on for 45 minutes or more. You should try to sit up for meditation once in the morning and once in the evening, before taking food. After eating a substantial meal, two or more hours should elapse before attempting meditation. When sitting, the spinal column should be straight and the head erect. Muscular tenseness must be avoided. If you are not accustomed to sit cross-legged on the floor you should sit in a chair, tucking the feet under the chair to facilitate an erect posture.

A very senior monk of the Order to which I have the privilege of belonging used to say that if you practise truthfulness and repeat a spiritual formula—which we call a *mantra*—that will be sufficient. But I should add that he took chastity for granted.

After *asana* comes *pranayama*. Now *pranayama* enables us to control *prana*, which is the vital energy in the system. It is one and the same energy that makes the earth move, the lungs work, and the heart beat. There is one cosmic energy: in our bodies and minds are found individual manifes-

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tations of it. This energy is not different in different individuals, any more than the electric current in one electric lamp is different from the current in another.

Now what Yoga aims to teach man is to control this vital energy in the system. Therefore *pranayama* is not control of breath, but control of *prana,* the energy which vitalizes the body. When *prana* leaves the system, the heart ceases to function, the lungs stop working, and the man is said to die. Here you say, 'He gave up the ghost', but our idea is that the ghost gives him up, that is to say, the psychic or subtle body of man gives up the gross, physical body. *Pranayama,* if practised at all, must be practised along the right lines. It is better to learn it from a teacher than to practise merely after reading books.

Pratyahara follows *pranayama. Pratyahara* simply means gathering in the forces of the mind, which have been scattered. Suppose you buy a packet of mustard seeds from the grocer and break it; or the packet breaks by mistake and the seeds are scattered. How will you collect up the seeds? You must sweep them together and pick them up, perhaps one by one. This is the usual condition of the minds of adult people. In the case of a young boy, his heart and mind are concentrated upon what he tries to do; but the man who settles down and marries gives half his heart and mind to his wife, and keeps the other half to move about. When a child is born, another portion of his heart and mind goes to the child, and so on. Then there is the bank account to be kept: the balance must be all right. He must have a good reputation among his fellows. Thus his energy is dissipated and mind distracted. How can he switch his mind on to God? He finds it very difficult. There are two forces that act upon the mind of man, one takes the mind away from its centre, and the other draws it in. Drawing

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the mind in is *pratyahara* and this is what the beginner tries to do when he sits for meditation.

Dharana, the sixth step, is fixing the mind upon one spot. If God is the object of meditation, then *dharana* is concentrating on God, thinking of Him as the Creator of the universe. In Yoga we say that the object of meditation should be conceived as within man. No doubt there is great benefit to be derived by meditating on God, even conceived as outside man, but He should be thought of as within —that is the emphasis in Yoga. Jesus asks us to pray to the Father in heaven, as though heaven were in a place apart from us; but His higher teaching is, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' In Browning's poem, 'Pippa Passes', Pippa sings, 'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world,' but I am afraid that though God is in His heaven, there is much that is wrong with the world. That is because God has not entered into the hearts of these four billion people. If He were to enter into the heart of man, man would be transformed. That would be Yoga.

Suppose a man meditates on Jesus Christ or thinks with great devotion and faith of Mary, the Mother of Christ. In meditation proper, as understood in Yoga, there is little use in thinking of their outward persons and of the historical events in the lives of Christ and Mary. The aspirant must penetrate behind all that. His mind has to be focused on one point. There is no use in thinking of anything of this world; all that can come later. When a man sinks deep, into himself, trying to arrive at the very essence of his being, which we call the Atman, the Self, he cannot think of other things.

Yogic exercises are good, but not sufficient. Yoga says that you should think of God or Reality or whatever it is that you concentrate on, as internal, as within yourself.

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In this connection they speak of the seven centres of consciousness. One should meditate at the heart centre, as it is called. By this is meant not the physiological heart, but the psychic or mystical heart, which is about an inch above the pit of the stomach and in the interior of the body. There one seats the object of meditation, whether it be an Incarnation of God, or a great Teacher, or a conception or symbol of God. This will transform the mind. When the mind moves about the three centres below the heart, it is not benefited. The heart centre is the starting-point for spiritual thought.

Sometimes people say that when they think of God, the mind moves upward. That is good, but it should come naturally and as the result of practice; not by merely having the idea that one can meditate at a point between the eyebrows. If you succeed in meditation at the heart centre, then the other centres will reveal themselves to you in due course. You may plant a rose, but you cannot push it into bloom. Similarly, you should not try to force things in meditation.

The heart centre is extremely important. There is said to be a lotus flower with eight red petals, in the heart centre. Before meditation it is in the form of a bud with the petals closed and drooping; but at the time of meditation the lotus stands erect and blooms. We imagine that the lotus is blooming, and in that is the sun. Within the sun is the moon. Within the moon is fire. Within the fire we seat the object of meditation. If, for instance, Krishna is our Chosen Ideal, we think of Him seated within the fire. When the sun is placed within the lotus, the petals are not burnt, for both the sun and the lotus are mystical.

In the beginning, in the initial stages, of spiritual effort, it is advisable to think of Divinity as possessing form. First comes the thought of God with form; in many cases—in

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most cases—He is thought of in the form of a human being. Later comes meditation on God without form but with attributes; and finally comes meditation on the formless, attributeless Absolute Being, or Pure Consciousness. This is the way—by stages. These are the three levels of spiritual life and experience, and they are for everyone. One thinks of a Divine form in the interior of one's being, in one's heart, and persists until it is directly experienced.

The formful and the formless aspects of God are like the obverse and reverse of one and the same coin. If you say that you want a coin with only the image of the Queen and not the design on the other side, you will not even have the side with the Queen, because you cannot have a coin with only one side. Formless God is the basis of God with form. The illustration of the ocean is useful. As the ocean, water has, roughly speaking, no form; but as waves, the water has form—the form of the waves. The great Teachers are like waves on the bosom of the ocean. Such Teachers are very few. All that we have of religion and philosophy, all the ideas, teachings, and principles that have come down to us from time immemorial, can be traced to perhaps half-a-dozen such Teachers; in the West, Jesus Christ; in India, Krishna and certain others; and then there are Moses, Buddha, and let us say, Confucius; altogether very few. You can count them almost on the fingers of one hand. Think of them, and at once you think of their principles.

One may start with God with form; but there are a few strong-minded people who can start with no form. Generally they think of God with attributes. And how do you think of the attributes of God? It is difficult to do so without having the idea that God is a person come into it somehow. So we say it is good to start with a form; nothing wrong in it: but proceed higher and attain to formlessness.

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Gradually the mind which has been moving over the external universe, is brought to a point, and deepened by meditation with faith. By months and years of meditation you acquire the power to meditate upon what is called primal energy, the primal energy that projects this universe. The ego is then in communion with this primal energy which is the power of God.

After years of practice, one attempts to forget the ego, to forget the individuality. Eventually, the ego will be transcended. The ego is not destroyed, but transcended. Ego-consciousness does not exist in Pure Being, to which the Yogi attains. It is not enough to think of God as Unity. Unity implies its contrary, duality. You cannot describe it; therefore the least inaccurate way of describing God the Absolute is to say what It is not. In Sanskrit we say '*neti, neti*', which means that God is 'not this, not this'.

After *dharana* comes *dhyana*. *Dharana* and *dhyana*—that constitutes meditation. *Dhyana* is very difficult, for it is next door only to the super-conscious state, *samadhi*—the Light that illumines man, the Peace that passes all understanding. That is the highest.

Now *dhyana*, meditation, has been likened to the pouring of oil from one vessel to another without a break. The mind must flow towards the object of meditation without a single break for 24 minutes. When you succeed in that, then you are said to have attained one *samadhi*. We had a teacher in the last century: he passed away in 1886. He used to say that it is very difficult to remain in this state for more than 21 days: if a man remains in it for more than 21 days, then his body falls. But he himself was able to remain in this state for six months at a time, a marvellous feat. The ego is not functioning then.

The final step of Yoga, then, following deep meditation

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is *samadhi,* which is superconsciousness. There are two types of *samadhi:* one, in which there is content of consciousness. God Himself is the content and you are communing with Him. There is another super consciousness, in which consciousness is contentless: that is Pure Being, Pure Consciousness. You cannot describe it.

The subconscious must be gradually purified, and for that the practice of a *mantra* is very useful. A *mantra* sinks from the level of the conscious plane into the subconscious, and there it works. You do not know how it works. The *mantra* should be uttered, say, a thousand times, morning and evening, and then you should try to meditate. Repetition of the *mantra* prepares the mind for meditation. The more you utter it the better. When you go to bed, repeat it a hundred times and then sleep with your head on the lap of God. He is your mother and He is your father. There is nothing wrong in thinking of Him as mother; we generally do, because mother is nearer to us than father. Father will pinch our ear if we make a mistake, but mother may not.

When you think in this way and practise a *mantra* at the time of going to bed, after some time you will find that you wake up in the morning with the utterance of that *mantra.* The thought that was uppermost; that was the last when you went to bed, comes up first in the morning. Why does this happen? It is because the *mantra* was working in the subconscious during the night: it rises to the conscious level of the mind when you wake up. The *mantra* moves through and purifies the sub-conscious. It gradually transforms a man.

Yoga is the Sanskrit word meaning to join or to yoke. The word has at least seventeen subsidiary meanings, according to the dictionary. The primary meaning, however,

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has always been the same, namely, Yoga is communion with God. Yoga is a science. It is applied psychology. Not only is it the means to achieve the purpose of life, but it enables one to do anything one does, even in the world, with great energy and with great benefit to other people.

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CHAPTER 3

Lessons in Meditation

Swami Gnaneswarananda

Relaxation

From the very dawn of Indian history the Indo-Aryans gave a great deal of importance to the culture and development of the inner faculties of human life. As a result of long experience and experiment, they developed a special system of exercise for increasing the strength, purity and power of these faculties. Having established a fundamental theory that the human body is divided into different layers of being, they discovered various methods of feeding, resting and revitalizing them.

The physical body is an outer shell or covering for the inner body, which contains all the powers and potentialities of perfection. If the physical body needs food, rest, exercise, and also certain favourable conditions of living for its growth and upkeep, so does the subtle. What provision have we made for the development, for the exercise, rest and revitalization of the inner body, including its leader, the mind? It is a matter of deep regret that while we are busy improving the condition of our physical body, we are almost starving to death the inner, which, if nourished and nurtured with care, could produce the most wonderful results, on the material as well as the spiritual plane.

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The science of meditation was developed in India for the purpose of supplying the mind with the necessary nourishment, for giving it proper exercise and relaxation, and also for furnishing it with the necessary conditions for growth. Therefore, meditation can very well be defined as the science of supplying the mind with the favourable environment necessary for the manifestation of its highest potential—which is perfection.

Let us try to understand this analogy. In receiving the food for our physical body the natural law is, that in the course of metabolism we undergo a process of disbursement and waste which must be replenished by drawing in a supply from some sources of nature. We eat because we need certain elements and ingredients which we have spent in the course of our work. But the food we eat is not the only kind we supply to the physical body. The five senses also are drawing in food for its nourishment and development. In the selection of food we know we have to be very careful as there can be harmful as well as beneficial foods. For the replenishment of our mental energy also, we draw in naturally from various external sources. There is a special process of meditation which gives us the power of putting ourselves in constant touch with these subtle sources from which we can so lavishly draw our spiritual food, without incurring any expenditure. We shall discuss this process of meditation later. It will be sufficient to note here that all the consideration we give to selecting our physical food must also be applied to obtaining spiritual nourishment.

The next item is to give the mind its necessary exercise. We all know that by lack of exercise our muscles and nerves degenerate and deteriorate; whereas by regular exercise they can be developed to an almost infinite degree and amount of strength and efficiency. It has been demonstrated by

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many athletes and men of unusual physical strength that by proper exercise the power of the muscles and other physical faculties can be developed to any degree of efficiency. The story is told about a farmer who used to carry a little pet calf across a stream. This he did every day. The calf gradually grew up, but the farmer continued to carry it without being conscious of its physical development. When his attention was drawn to the fact, he realized that it was a full-grown bull he had been carrying so easily! Although a story, this illustrates how by gradual exercise one can develop the muscular power to an unbelievable degree.

In India I have seen wonderful feats of physical strength I knew a man who could stop, by means of ropes, two automobiles going at full speed. This same man could hold an elephant on a small platform placed across his chest. I had the occasion to question him about the development of his Herculean strength and received the most convincing answer. He said that it was by regular practice and by constant visualization of a very definite mental picture of his ideal of growth that he came to attain such phenomenal strength. Then, in a very simple way, without any vanity or pride, he added that he would be satisfied when he would be able to stop as easily, the 'Punjab Mail', the speediest train in India at that time.

It requires no proof to demonstrate the fact that by means of exercise we can develop the strength of our physical body to an inconceivable extent. However, what we do not realize, perhaps, is that the same is true regarding the development of our mental faculties. Through lack of exercise our spiritual and mental powers have pitifully degenerated. Consequently, we have lost control over our body; we have lost our memory; we have lost the power of discrimination, foresight, and many other subtle manifestations of

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mental power. But since these faculties have been exercised and cultured by many to an amazing degree of proficiency, it proves the fact that anyone can do so, by regular, scientific exercise.

I have seen people who had cultured their power of concentration to such an extent that they could read any book, page by page, at a single glance. The psychology behind this is not very difficult to understand. We know that when a child learns to read he does so letter by letter. He must spell each word before he comprehends its meaning. As he grows up, he can read word by word. When he advances further, he can even read a whole sentence at a glance. Developing the same faculty still more, a whole thought or a paragraph can be read at a glance. By developing the focus of the mind a whole page can be read as easily as the sentence or paragraph.

Very often certain problems present themselves to us in our lives. Because we do not know how to bring the mind to a state of poise we cannot arrive at any definite and constructive decision. But a concentrated mind can probe with ease into the deepest problem and find a solution which would be impossible for a disturbed mind even to apprehend. The culture and attainment of a concentrated condition of the mind is absolutely necessary for every person, no matter what he or she wants to achieve in life.

A mind uncultured and uneducated in meditation and concentration fails to understand clearly the benefits or disadvantages of certain surroundings, whereas, a meditative mind can at once accommodate to and make the best use of any environment in which it is placed. If a need for change should arise such a mind knows unmistakably the practical, mental and spiritual process necessary for making it.

Of utmost importance is the need for giving complete

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rest and relaxation to the mind. Mother Nature has arranged for a wonderful process of rest for the physical body by raising that 'blessed barrier between day and day.' But the poor overburdened mind seldom gets any rest, even during sleep. It must be allowed to recuperate by a definite method of meditation. When we do not get sufficient sleep for a few days we know how miserable we feel. But, the fact is, the poor mind is kept practically without any sleep, rest or recuperation from the very day it came into existence until the end of life! No wonder that it has become weakened and has lost its vitality. Undoubtedly, it has a wonderful power of resistance; otherwise, it would have been demolished by the cruel and relentless treatment to which it is constantly subjected.

There is a definite method of meditation to give the mind its much needed recess of rest and relaxation which we shall presently discuss. Very often we think that a change of occupation brings relaxation to the mind. We may think we are relaxing but the fact is, we are not. What we usually do is this: we put aside strenuous and tiresome occupations of the mind for something new, of a lighter type. But this cannot be considered proper relaxation. Real relaxation of the mind can only be had by completely unharnessing it from the task of dragging along any physical, intellectual, or emotional burden. Only when the mind is completely free when it is not controlled, manipulated, or used by any other function, does it enjoy freedom and rest. This state of the mind can only be attained by a special process of meditation and concentration.

The sense of fatigue, disgust or depression of the mind comes only because of a psychological confusion under which we are labouring every moment. This confusion is caused by the miscomprehension of the subject and the object—the

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'I' and the 'not-I'. It is the 'not-I' which is active, which is doing everything, and which is moving to and fro in this world of phenomena. The real 'I' is the witness; it is the illuminator. It takes no active part in any of the functions, either of the body or of the mind, save and except illumining them by means of its innate radiance. The moment we are able to distinguish in consciousness between the 'I' and the 'not-I', the 'I' or the subject at once experiences release, rest and tranquillity. This surprising fact needs particular emphasis. Is it not rather strange that, although we know we *possess* a body and a mind, for all practical purpose we *think that we are* the body and the mind? The simple logic to be applied is this: if we say, I have a body and a mind, the relationship between my 'self' and the body and the mind is one of *possessor and possessed.* The body and mind are the objects possessed by the possessor, which is the real 'I'. Why then, is there this meaningless confusion between the possessor and the possessed? Do we not, in our practical life, always take the possessed for the possessor? Is not our ordinry consciousness of the 'I' identical with the body and mind? Where has the possessor gone? In fact, the real 'I' is not recognized at all. As soon as we discover, and put the real 'I' on its eternal throne of glory, we experience wonderful rest, relaxation, and complete unharnessing of the mind, no matter what the physical system might be doing. As soon as we realize the independent existence of that higher 'I', we enjoy the most intense degree of rest even in the midst of the most intense activity.

The philosophy behind the practice of relaxation is to experience by means of our meditation the peaceful and all-perfect nature of the higher Self. Its real nature has been very beautifully described in one of the Upanishads, by a very suggestive and deep simile, the tree of life.

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Human life has been compared to a gigantic tree which sends its roots deep down into the unfathomable bottom of the Unknown. It is nurtured and nourished by the sap of that unknown Infinite, which is Brahman. Its strong trunk is the trunk of karma, which has been attained, accumulated, through successions of incarnations. The whole tree is held firm by that trunk. In the shape of its different aptitudes and inclinations it sends out many branches in every direction. These branches produce innumerable twigs, buds, leaves, flowers and fruit, representing the results of the impressions and experiences through which human life is advancing. The leaves appear in due time. They develop, attain maturity, remain on the tree for awhile, and finally, having left their contribution for the upkeep of the tree, they drop off, making room for other leaves to come.

In much the same way, our experiences appear, remain for a while, mature and then drop off. But when they drop off they do not vanish altogether. They leave their share of experience for the growth of the 'tree'. As in the case of the tree so in human life, flowers appear and gradually develop into fruit. Fruit in their maturity drop off, having left their contribution towards the development of the tree. The 'flowers and fruit' are the results of our actions, good, bad, and indifferent. They appear, remain for awhile, and then drop off, contributing to the store-house of our *samskaras*.

Seated at the top of this tree of life, but not supported by or depending upon it, is a Bird, self-poised, self-illumined and self-contained. It is always blissful, always cheerful. It never depends upon anything for its existence, happiness, or knowledge. It is radiating brilliance, effulgence; and the tree beneath is illumined by that heavenly light. This Bird never leaves its throne of glory at the top of the tree, for it has no desire, now wants. It has everything.

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There is another bird, very similar in appearance, which occupies the body of the tree. It has no fixed place of its own. It is moving constantly and hopping from branch to branch. It is always hungry and restless. Oh, the greed of this bird! The more it eats the more hungry it seems to be. Every moment is spent in finding and tasting new fruit. When it tastes a sweet one it experiences a temporary feeling of joy and happiness. But immediately that sense of satisfaction is gone, it is hungry again. It seizes another fruit which perhaps is bitter. Then it receives a shock and, looking around, it catches a glimpse of the beauty and radiance of the self-effulgent Bird above. It feels a great attraction and aspires after it. But, in the next moment, it forgets and darts after another fruit.

While moving in search of fruit, the restless bird, being attracted unknowingly and imperceptibly by the other Bird, is slowly moving towards it in the form of a spiral. When a sense of satiety and satisfaction finally comes, the bird begins to feel disinclined to go round and round in search of fruit. Sometimes it takes a direct flight towards the higher Bird and reaches it quickly. But more often the process of approach towards the higher one takes place rather slowly and gradually until, eventually, the lower bird comes very near the higher one, whose radiance and poise are reflected very distinctly on its personality. Finally, it is absorbed into the upper Bird and loses its separate existence. It realizes that the lower bird was only a shadow of itself. All is *maya!* The only reality is the higher Bird, which took no active part in the process of the growth and development of the tree of life.

Our real Self is the higher Bird. The lower bird, or our physical and mental systems, is just the shadow of the higher one. The exercise of relaxation consists in putting oneself in the position of the top Bird.

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First Exercise

Sit anywhere, in any posture, absorbed in your own thought, and hold your consciousness on the illumined Bird. Know that you are the Witness Self. Affirm inwardly, 'I am not the body or the mind. They are mind. My real "I" is neither the physical body nor the mind. I am always separate, ever independent, and eternally free from this body. I am the Witness; I am watching every sensation, which is appearing and disappearing on the physical plane, without in any way taking part in the process. I am eternally blissful, self-contained, self-illumined, and self-existent. I am Perfection Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, and Bliss Absolute. I am That! I am that illumined Bird, the ever-perfect Atman!"

Making this affirmation and holding your consciousness firmly on the plane of the top Bird, allow the mind to wander freely to any thought. Do not try to check it. Let it eat all the fruit it wants. Upon realizing that it is constantly being watched by the higher Self, it will become more and more restful, and the yearning will awaken within it to go to its home, which is the position of the upper Bird.

This exercise should be practised as frequently as possible. Whenever you have a little time to spare, visualize this picture. Repeat this *mantra* to yourself: I AM THAT—remembering, in the form of a vivid picture, the whole idea contained in the metaphor of the tree of life. Practise it so that the very mention of these words—I AM THAT—at once puts you in the position of the upper Bird. While riding to office, sitting in your home or in an open park, while reclining at home after a busy day, in fact during any of those intervals which you naturally enjoy between your busy moments enter into this thought. It will give you a wonderful sense of relaxation and of peace. Practise this as often as you can.

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Gradually, try to incorporate the truth into your system so that you do not have to give any conscious thought to the exercise, and it will become as natural to you as the breath of your nostrils.

Drawing from the Infinite Source of Supply

The unique, vital, and most practical theory of Yoga philosophy is that man has come on earth holding as his birthright possession over an infinite source of supply within himself, for the attainment of absolute perfection. This theory has been applied not only in the realm of spiritual unfoldment. Many yogis have demonstrated the fact that even all our physical supplies, such as food, air, water, and the like, can also be drawn from our own internal nature.

A very interesting story is told about the sage who discovered this special knowledge of drawing nourishment from the infinite source of supply, even for the physical system.

This sage was reared from early infancy in one of the forest retreats. The only people he had ever seen were the monks who lived in the monastery. He grew up to be a brilliant scholar and his teacher expected that his young disciple would become one of the most prominent of the *rishis* (sages) and perhaps contribute something unique towards the fund of human knowledge and advancement. However, the teacher noticed one particular shortcoming in the young man. He was proficient in all the different branches of philosophy and was highly advanced in the practice of Yoga; but in the understanding of human nature he was more or less ignorant, because all of his knowledge about the world came from books. He had never had any opportunity of contacting people outside the monastery.

Every morning it was the custom of the monks to send

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someone from the monastery to the neighbouring village to get a supply of prepared food, sufficient to last them for the whole day. One morning the teacher asked this young man to go to the village for the food. It was the first time he was going out of the monastery and the young ascetic looked forward to this new experience. He walked out of the forest and entered the village. For the first time in his life he found men who were very different from those he had known. He talked to some of them and was very interested in what they had to say. As he had been directed by his teacher, he knocked at the door of the first house he saw. The door was opened by a young girl. She stood there with the food ready to offer it to the monk. But he was so surprised to see for the first time in his life, a person other than a man, that he looked with wonder and amazement at her. This seemed to embarrass the young girl, who turned away. The monk asked her to wait. He said he wanted to ask her some questions. Why did she look as she did; why were there so many differences in her features from those of men, and many other questions which the young girl could not possibly answer. She said, 'Please wait. I shall call my mother. She will answer your questions.'

As soon as she saw the young monk, the mother realized the situation. She understood that it was the first time the monk had seen a woman. With the tender care of a mother she explained everything the young monk asked her. She told him that woman was intended to be the mother of the race and this was the primary and most important mission of her life. For that reason, God created her in such a way that every faculty, every limb of her body, developed towards the fulfilment of that great mission. She pointed out that, if woman looks tender, it is because such tenderness would be necessary for raising the child. If her voice is sweet and

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soft, it is because she is to contribute these soothing qualities to the future generation. She also emphasized the fact that nature makes such provision that when the child is born it receives a bountiful supply of food, which is storu edp in the body of the mother long before the arrival of the baby.

The young monk was very much impressed with this knowledge, which his books had not taught him. He was amazed, and said, 'Do you mean to say that long before I was born, my God made it a point to see that my food was stored up in the body of my mother?' The lady answered in the affirmative. This seemed to over-whelm the young monk. He rose to go. The lady reminded him to take the food which he had come for, but he shook his head, indignantly. 'No more of that superstition,' he said; 'I am through with it!'

The young monk returned to the monastery. When he was asked about the food, he replied in the form of a few wonderful verses, reprimanding the teacher for his negligence in not teaching him the truth that the God who sent him into the world was so kind and considerate that he had even made provision for his food, in the person of his mother. He asked, 'Do you think that God has died or has been unmindful of His business, that He neglected to make further provision for my sustenance when I grew up? It is now my strongest conviction that everything, physical, mental, as well as spiritual, that I may ever stand in need of, must have been supplied to me by my God. I will discover and teach the world how to get in touch with that infinite Source of supply!'

Tradition ascribes the discovery of this truth to this particular *rishi*. Apart from this legend, it has, in fact, been established on the ground of reason and experiment

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that a man can draw all his supply from within. Indian Yogis have remained buried under the earth for long periods of time. Even recently, there have been many amazing demonstrations of 'miraculous' phenomena by persons who, by assuming certain postures or manipulating some of their functions and organs, placed their bodies in such a condition that they had no need of any food, air, or water. In fact, they raised themselves above all demands of nature.

Various practices have been taught by the yogis for the revitalization and replenishment of the mental and spiritual, as well as the physical systems. In the first place, we shall discuss the process of drawing our spiritual food from the spiritual source of nature, just as we procure our physical food from the physical.

Vibrations raised in the thought atmosphere by any individual are never lost. They remain in a very subtle state of existence, always ready to rush into an individual consciousness whenever a special affinity is established. A very suggestive illustration may be given to explain this. After turning a stringed instrument to a particular pitch, strike the corresponding note on the piano. You will notice that whenever this particular note on the piano is sounded it creates a corresponding vibration in the stringed instrument, although it may be placed at some distance from the piano. But other notes, high or low, which you may sound on the piano will not have any effect on the instrument.

Similarly, when one tunes the lute of one's consciousness to a certain pitch, it at once draws to itself corresponding thought-vibrations, present in the thought-atmosphere. The thought-vibrations of Buddha, Christ, and all the prophets, saints and sages, are present in the thought-atmosphere. So are the thought-vibrations of others. So we have to be particularly careful to contact desirable ones and avoid

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undesirable ones. Therefore, it is necessary to learn the science of spiritual hygiene, in order to keep above the infection of undesirable thoughts and to open ourselves to the benign influence of elevating thoughts.

A special exercise of Yoga is to be practised for that purpose. In order to put ourselves in touch with positive and purifying thought-vibrations, some adjustments must be made in the individual consciousness, to establish its connection with the main current of supply. For instance, here is an electric light and on the wall is a switch. If I push that particular switch, it will establish connection with this bulb and the current of electricity. By handling that particular switch alone, can I establish the connection. I might be pressing every spot on the wall, but until I press the right switch I will get no light from this bulb. Likewise, to connect our individual thoughts with those of the powerful spiritual dynamo a special switch, let us say, located at a particular spot in the human body, must be properly used. In Yoga the lotus is a symbol used to designate certain places, or 'switches', in the spine. These are not. of course, to be thought of as real lotuses. It is symbolic.

Second Meditation Exercise

Within the brain, corresponding to the place between the eyebrows, visualize the luminous symbol of a white lotus having two petals surrounding a disc. The lotus is turned upwards. It is in full bloom. The symbol of the full moon is lying on the disc and it emanates a rays of pure, white light. Sit erect and meditate on that white lotus, visualizing clearly and distinctly those darting rays emanating from the symbol of the full moon. Feel that through the medium of those rays all the thought-vibrations set in motion and stored in the thought-atmosphere by all the great spiritual

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men and women of the world are rushing into you. Feel that every atom of your being is being surcharged with those vibrations.

Make the following affirmation: 'I am drawing in from the thought-atmosphere thoughts that are uplifting, purifying and strengthening. All the thought-treasures accumulated by the prophets, sages, and masters, are mine. Within my consciousness are all the thought-powers of all the prophets of the world, belonging to every age and race, every nationality and religion.'

After meditating in this manner for at least ten minutes, do the second part of this exercise (Exercise No. 3 below) for revitalizing your physical and mental systems. The theory with regard to the second part of the practice is, that this physical body of ours is constituted of the combination of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air, ether. There are certain qualities and powers inherent in each one of these cosmic forces. By establishing our connection with these elemental forces we can draw our supply from the storehouse of the cosmic. Here, again, special 'switches' put us in connection with one or the other of these different cosmic sources. These connections are established by controlling and concentrating upon certain centres within our body. These centres have been described as lotuses, but do not think of them as having physical lotuses in them. The lotus, as I mentioned, is a mystic symbol, and the yogis have used this symbol for ages and ages.

Third Meditation Exercise

Sit straight and erect, with the back, neck and head in a straight line. Visualize, within the base of the spine, a red lotus having four petals, surrounding a disc. The lotus is fully open and radiant in colour and beauty. The

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lotus is turned upwards. On the disc there is the symbol of an equilateral triangle, the apex of which points towards your back. Visualize this triangle made of lucid and brilliant white light, on the background of the red disc of the lotus. It is sending forth luminous rays all around which form the medium of communication for the powers and strength of Cosmic Earth. Feel that you are recharging and revitalizing your whole system with the qualities of Mother Earth.

Repeat mentally, with joy and happiness, the following affirmation: 'I am awakening the qualities of firmness, steadiness, and fixity in my system, from Mother Earth. Arise, O Cosmic Mother! Fill me with thy spirit! Thou holdest on thy bosom mountains, oceans, and plains. Hold me firm so that I may not swerve from my purpose of attaining absolute perfection. I am firmly fixed in my health, purpose, will, and spiritual ideal. No force on earth can ever dare to shake me. I am as strong, firm, and steady as Mother Earth.'

Next, visualize a second lotus within the spine, corresponding to the place of the generative organ. This lotus has six petals of vermilion colour, surrounding a disc. On the disc there is a symbol of the crescent moon, white in colour, sending forth shooting rays. The curve of the crescent is pointed backwards. Feel that through those rays the vitalizing and rejuvenating influences from Cosmic Water are flowing within you.

Make the following affirmation: 'Awake, arise, O thou Friend of all! Fill my system with thy power and qualities! I am drawing within myself the virtues of modesty, humility, and accommodativeness from Cosmic Water. I am not vain or proud. I am least of all; I am the servant of all. It is my privilege to be able to render any service to any being. As water is able to accommodate itself to

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any environment, taking upon itself the fullest share of the qualities of the same, without losing an iota of its own intrinsic nature; likewise, I am so constituted that I can adjust myself to the advantages and disadvantages of all circumstances, retaining always the fullest degree and measure of my own intrinsic perfection. I am as soft, fluid, supple, and accommodative as Cosmic Water.'

Visualize another lotus within the spine, corresponding to the place of the navel. It is scarlet in colour, having ten petals surrounding a disc. On the scarlet background of the disc is the symbol of another triangle, the apex pointing towards the front of the body. This triangle, made of brilliant, but soft, white light, is the symbol of Cosmic Fire. As in the previous exercises, suggest to your mind the idea that the shooting rays from this symbol of the triangle are the medium through which you are drawing in the cosmic qualities of Elemental Fire.

Make the following affirmation: 'Arise, awake, O Ancient Power, and charge my system with thy force. I am expressing, from the source of Cosmic Fire, the qualities of vitality, purity, and the power to purify others. Just as fire overcomes all obstacles, comes forth victorious, and cannot be suppressed; likewise, my intrinsic perfection is coming to the forefront of my being, overcoming all obstacles. All infections, contacts and contaminations are burnt out by the fire of my spirit. I am ever-pure, always effulgent and, as eternally powerful as Cosmic Fire. I can purify the whole world by the touch of the fire within me.'

Again visualize a lotus within the spine, corresponding to the place of the heart. It is blue in colour and has twelve petals surrounding a disc. There is the figure of two reverse triangles, or a six-pointed star, lying on the disc. The symbol is made of brilliant, but soft, white light and it is shooting

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forth rays all around. These rays are the medium of contact between the individual consciousness and the power of Cosmic Air. Fill yourself with the idea that every atom of your body is being surcharged with the qualities of Cosmic Air.

Make the following affirmation: 'Come, oh Brother, come! Give me the touch of thy freedom! Arise, awake within me in thy full vigour and expression. I am as free as air. Just as air goeth where it listeth, without being in any way attached or confined to, or possessed by, anything; likewise, I feel free, not being attached to anything in this world. I am free—ready to attach and ready to detach—like air. I am flowing freely, without any obstruction, cheerfully carrying the message of happiness, fuller life, and revitalization wherever I go. I am the soul of Cosmic Air.'

Next, visualize another lotus within the spinal column, corresponding to the place of the neck. It is grey in colour and has sixteen petals surrounding a disc. On the disc is the symbol of a luminous white circle. From this circle of light, rays are emanating all around, forming the medium of contact between you and the force of Cosmic Ether. Meditate on the vital force entering into your system, filling every pore of your being.

Make the following affirmation: 'Awake, arise, in thy mighty glory, thou all-pervading, eternal and universal Substance! Fill me with thy radiance, limitlessness and universality. I am as limitless and universal as Cosmic Ether. I am the basic principle underlying everything, from the highest angels, gods and demigods down to the lowliest of creatures that crawl on the earth. I am the soul of all. I am in everything, everything is in me. I am in the rich, I am in the poor. I am in the powerful, I am in the meek. I am in the wise, I am in the ignorant. I am in the

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beautiful, I am in the ugly. Everywhere, in everything, I am the essence of existence. Finding myself everywhere, how can I be narrow or limited in my understanding; how can I hate anything? I am intoxicated with the drink of universal love, toleration and understanding. I am the spirit of Cosmic Ether.'

Do these exercises at least twice a day and gradually a special unfoldment will take place in you. If you can persist in continuing your exercises unobstructed for about a year you will find that you have developed wonderful qualities in your personality. You will always have a sense of deep satisfaction which will place you above all feelings of want or imperfection. In fact, your mind will become a kingdom to you. The bliss arising out of the fulfilment of your spiritual ideal cannot in any way be compared with the attainment of any wordly thing which you might desire. The nature of all worldly things is to perish. You cannot own any treasure for eternity. The possession of worldly treasures only multiplies the desire for possessing more. For that reason, if you think that by learning to draw from the infinite source of supply you will attract or possess material wealth, it will only create more disturbance and want than ever. No earthly possession can make a person satisfied. It is possession of spiritual understanding which gives you 'ownership' over everything.

Once an Emperor met a yogi. He took him to his palace. He told him that he had fabulous wealth, he had everything he wanted. He asked the ascetic to come with him to his chapel for prayers. The yogi and the Emperor began to pray. But the Emperor, in the course of his prayer, begged God for more wealth, more power, more territory, longer life, and so on and so forth. Even before the prayers were over the holy man rose to leave. The Emperor stopped

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and asked him why he was leaving. The holy man said, 'I have made a mistake. I thought I came to visit the Emperor. I did not have any idea that I was keeping company with the meanest beggar I have ever seen. I have known beggars who begged for a piece of cloth or a morsel of bread. But here I have discovered the meanest of them all! One, whose wants are so great that he has submitted a whole list of his desires to his God!' The Emperor was ashamed and, realizing his mistake, embraced the life of real spirituality.

Let us always bear in mind that the greatest supply that we can draw upon is for the unfoldment of our spiritual perfection, attaining which we may enjoy infinite bliss and eternal life.

Posture and Breathing

Before we take up for discussion our study of the direction, time, place, posture and breathing in meditation, I should like to draw your special attention to one fact. All directions are God's directions. All places are God's places. God is everywhere; the Truth is everywhere. So by sitting in one particular place or direction alone no extra spirituality is to be gained. Many people think that just by sitting in a special posture, or breathing in a certain way, they will become perfect. But, perfection can never be gained by any mechanical means. Nevertheless, in the beginning, we can derive much benefit from these external conditions, observing them as mere accessories. While a beginner should avail himself of all favourable currents and conditions of the environment, yet with higher unfoldment he gradually becomes free from all external conditions. Freedom is our goal, not slavery to time, space or conditions.

When a little tree is planted by the roadside, it should

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be protected by a defensive hedge built around it. In no way does the fence, itself, contribute towards the growth and development of the plant. In fact, it is a hindrance to the growth of the tree. However, to protect it from the onslaught of disturbing elements, the fence must be maintained until the seedling grows into a strong tree.

All accessory measures that are taught for the practice of meditation are to be considered as the fence around the little plant of our spirituality. When the tree grows up, the fence should be taken away. Churches rituals teachers. books. food regulations, and the like, can protect our spiritual plant for some time, but after it grows up the barbed-wire fence of our rituals may kill the tree itself! Follow observances with reason and discrimination, but do not let them cripple your manhood. Do not be a slave to anything.

With regard to the topic of direction, there is a very beautiful incident which is recorded as having happened in the life of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion He once went to a very famous temple. Everyone was sitting facing the image, except Guru Nanak, who was meditating with his back to it. A temple priest pushed him rudely and asked why he was sitting in the wrong direction. Calmly the Guru answered, 'I do not know which is the right direction. Will you please direct me to it?' The priest pointed to the image and said, 'Why, don't you see that the Deity is there?' The Guru smiled and pointed away from the shrine said, 'I find Him there, as well. In fact, I find Him everywhere. Can you show me a place where the Deity is not? Do you mean to say that only this stone idol, this image, is the Deity? It is not!' For Guru Nanak, every direction was the right direction.

However, we are just beginning, so we should observe certain regulations. When you sit for meditation, where

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possible face the east. The earth's daily rotation is from the west to the east. So, facing east we face the direction of the motion. It is similar to riding in a train or a car and facing the direction in which it is moving. Many people, as you know, become sick while riding backwards. It has been observed that during the time of meditation one's nerves become very sensitive and the slighest discomfort creates a strong disturbance in the system. At other times we may not be so sensitive to the current, but during the time of meditation, when we are trying to bring all our faculties into a state of poise and equilibrium, this cross-current is deeply felt.

It will not be out of place to mention here another fact. When we sleep our nerves should attain a state of perfect equilibrium. At that time, also, the slightest disturbance creates unrest and irritation. Therefore, it is always beneficial to sleep with the head either east or south, looking west or north. Many cases of insomnia have been cured by a simple rearrangement of the bed, which placed the head in the proper direction. Also, if you cannot face east while meditating, face the north. The reason for facing the north is because of the magnetic polar current which is flowing from the south pole to the north. By facing north we face the direction of the current, and in sleeping, keeping our head to the south, the current passes over us from the head towards our feet. Here, a slight difference should be observed from the west-east motion. In the case of the earth's rotation it is we who are moving with the earth. Whereas, in the case of the polar current we are, more or less, stationary and the current is flowing over us. Therefore, in sleeping it is proper to place the head towards the direction from which the current is flowing. And in meditation, to face the direction of the current, that is north.

Next, let us consider the question of time. By experi-

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ment and by their keen observation of nature, the yogis found that there were four periods during a day of twenty-four hours when nature enters into a short period of rest, when everything in nature spontaneously tends towards poise and tranquility. Even birds, beasts and trees seem to enjoy an interval of calm during these periods. These four periods are called *sandhis,* or junctions, and they last for forty-five minutes each time, beginning twenty-two and one-half minutes before and lasting the same time after each one of these junctions. The first period is at sunrise, the second at noon, when the sun passes the meridian. The third is at sunset, and the fourth at midnight, when the sun passes the other meridian.

A student of Yoga should arrange his affairs and habits so as to avail himself of at least two, if not all, of those favourable periods for meditation. Besides the cosmic aspect, there is another reason why these four periods have been found very favourable for meditation, specially in India. From time immemorial it has been the custom of almost all grown-up people, men and women, to remember God, or their highest ideal, and enjoy a short period of silent contemplation during these times. All the yogis and students of meditation do their practices during these four periods. So, in India, a very potent spiritual influence is distinctly felt during these times of the day.

When I was living in Benares, as a young monk, there were times when, for some reason or other, I did not feel like following my daily routine of meditation. But I always had the privilege of being awakened early in the morning by a very powerful living alarm bell, calling me to arise and coaxing me to begin my morning meditation. About an hour before sunrise a man would pass by the road near the ashrama, singing a beautiful song. The words still ring in

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my ears: 'Wake up, wake up, O man! Is this the time to stay in bed? Get up, look around, and see that Nature is already wide-awake. The birds have begun to sing in praise of the Lord. The trees and flowers are looking up in admiration at the Divine! Only you, man, who claim to be the best of creation, remain in bed, wasting your time and life in laziness! Are you not ashamed?'

The words of that song, which that invisible singer would always send me as a special message, it seemed, never failed to rouse my spiritual consciousness whenever I felt the influence of *tamas,* or sleepiness and laziness, getting the better of me. I offer my tribute of gratitude and thankfulness to that man, who was to me a heavenly voice, without a form.

There were many other times, when I walked along the banks of the Ganges in the city of Benares and found thousands upon thousands of people at the time of sunset sitting quietly, absorbed in meditation. Even if I did not particularly feel like meditating the very potent influence of the atmosphere compelled me to find a spot where I could sit quietly in meditation.

Every serious student of Yoga knows how subtle thought-vibrations influence the mind favourably for the practice of meditation. However, if you cannot, for some reason, avail yourself of any of these four opportune periods, adjust your time for meditation so that there will be the least disturbance for you, and keep that time regularly every day. You will be able to create an atmosphere around you, by your steady practice, and will be drawn by the influence of association to do your practices.

You may have noticed that if you are in the habit of winding your watch every morning at eight o'clock, say, and if you become unmindful but suddenly remember that it is time to wind it, you look at the watch and find that it is

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exactly eight o'clock. This happens to everyone who keeps regular time for any work. One who rises early every morning does not need any alarm clock, because his very system serves the same purpose. In the case of your meditation, keep your time regularly every day, and the time will keep you steady in your practice.

Now, about the value of place. It must have been the experience of many of you that when you are surrounded by magnificent scenery in nature you spontaneously feel like soaring into the infinite. All worldly consciousness seems to vanish before the influence of such grandeur in nature. Those are the places naturally suited for meditation. Meditation should be practised, if possible, in the open air. One should look out into the distance and send one's thoughts into the vastness of space, rising above limitations of all kinds. Look into the vast expanse of space, sitting beside the sea, or on a mountain, or near a river, or some other place where you can extend your vision far, far away. You will find that gradually a feeling of vacancy will occupy your consciousness. All of your worries, petty thoughts, and limited ideas will gradually vanish, and you will naturally enter into a state of meditation.

However, it is difficult, I know, for many to avail themselves of such wonderful surroundings for their daily meditations. But, during the summer, when you are out of the city with all its bustle and excitemnt, make it a point to enjoy such natural meditation, influenced by the spell and soothing fascination of Mother Nature. You can do this at least for a few days during your vacation. The memory of that will abide with you and help you throughout the year.

The alternative to beautiful natural scenery is to reserve a special room, if you are able to do so. Otherwise, keep a corner of a room for the sole purpose of meditation. Do

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not use that room, or the corner you have set aside, for any other purpose except meditation. Keep it clean, and in your own way try to associate a feeling of sanctity and purity with it. If you have a special liking for any pictures or any symbols which you consider to be holy, put them there. If you have any association of holiness with any kind of incense or perfume, burn your incense or spread your perfume in that place. If you have any special appreciation of purity and holiness in flowers, put flowers in that room. When you want to go to your little shrine you will feel a sense of hesitation to enter your sanctum if you are not physically and mentally clean. That hesitation will gradually exercise such a potent influence on your mind that the very remembrance of that spot will be an effective warning for you and will gradually help to eliminte all narrow and unclean thoughts from your consciousness. When you go to your sanctum for meditation you will find that the powerful atmosphere of that place will fill your whole being, and you will feel very much uplifted. In fact, this is the psychological reason why churches, shrines and chapels came into existence. The real benefit, of course, in having an external chapel is to be able, gradually, to convert one's own body and mind into a chapel, the finest chapel, or living temple, of God.

However, may I remind you that this is only an accessory means. It is like the fence to be placed around the little tree until it grows. So, do not remain confined to a small chapel. Do not be corner-bound. Every place is God's place. Every spot is a holy spot. Before we learn to swim skilfully we cannot take the risk of going into deep water. In order to be able to practise without any hindrance, when we are beginners, we select a convenient corner. But we must not remain there all our lives.

The subject of posture has been discussed very elabora-

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tely in one of the systems of Yoga, called Hatha Yoga. But the postures and poses taught in that system are not essential for the practice of concentration and meditation. We shall now discuss only the principal postures involved in the practice of meditation.

Sit straight and erect on a chair, neither too high nor too low, neither too soft nor too hard. Or, sit on the floor on a cushion, if you prefer to do so. Keep your spine straight, with waist, back and neck in the same straight line. Keep the head upright, the eyes half closed, and look without any strain, mentally as it were, to the spot between the eye-brows. From many angles, this straight and upright posture of the body is necessary for meditation. One of the most obvious reasons is that it keeps the different organs in their right positions allowing them to function correctly without creating any extra burden on the system. Needless to say, this posture is very beneficial for the health and general well-being of the physical system. Meditation becomes easier of attainment if the physical body is not creating any hindrance. In meditation we have to forget the body. We cannot do so if the body causes us any concern.

The spiritual benefit of sitting in this posture is: whenever we try to uplift or raise our thoughts an upward current, starting from the base of the spine, rushes upwards towards the brain centres. This current finds an unobstructed passage through the spine only when it is in a straight upright position. The slightest hindrance has the tendency of forcing the current down, which causes a reaction in the system.

Whenever we get over some mood of depression, dejection or sorrow, we at once straighten up, as the first expression of our changed mental state. The simple reason is that, havngi thrown off the depression, the current within the spine compes us to assume an upright posture; it forces its way upwards,

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It follows, that when you hold and maintain the correct posture you can keep the mind above depressing thoughts.

If you prefer to sit on the floor I shall describe one or two postures that have some extra advantage over sitting on a chair. Before I do so, however, let me remind you that you may find it rather difficult and troublesome, and more harmful than helpful. You are not accustomed to sitting on the floor, so the joints of your legs are not very supple. Just because I have told you that there are some extra advantages to be gained by sitting on the floor, do not strive against your hereditary habit. We Hindus are taught from our childhood to sit on the floor. Our bones, muscles and joints are formed in such a way that we find it rather more difficult to sit straight on a chair, with the feet hanging down. I find it so, but if I sit on the floor, cross-legged, I can sit for hours without even for a moment bending my body.

If you are able to sit on the floor try to do so in the famous lotus posture, or *padmasana*. Put your right foot on your left thigh, and your left foot on the right thigh, with the soles of the feet upwards. Your feet, thus held on the thighs, create an angular force which at first presses your knee and then presses your waist forward, so that your spine is locked straight up. If you sit in that posture you will find it inconvenient to bend. The posture holds you in the correct position for meditation.[1]

Another posture is called *svastikasana*. Instead of

1 From what is said here about posture it might seem, to the beginner, that if one does sit on the floor for meditation, one should sit in *padmasana* or *svastikasana*. The Swami was taking *sukhasana* for granted. It is the posture that will suit most Westerners, since the other two are difficult. *Sukhasana* is what is normally understood by the words 'sitting cross-legged'; that is to say, the upper, outer parts of the feet rest on the floor. *Padmasana* is a counsel of perfection.—*Eds.*

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putting the feet on the thighs, tuck them in the hollows inside the knee joints, between the leg and the thigh. Put your right toes inside your left knee pit. With the left hand hold the left toes, and , slipping the other hand under the right leg, draw the left toes into the right knee pit. Lay your palms on your lap, the right one over the left, with the palms facing up. This posture, also, like the *padmasana,* has the benefit of creating a pressure which keeps the spine perfectly straight. The word *svastikasana* means the posture for peace and success. *Padma* means lotus.

However, it should be very clearly understood that perfection can never be attained by sitting on the floor, or by sitting in any posture, for that matter. It is your *mind* which you must bring under control by regular practice and right living. As accessory means, right posture and such other exercises should be practised. And if you find it difficult to sit on the floor, sit on a chair by all means. Do not be carried away by curiosity or the vanity of doing something which others may not be able to do.

Next we take up the practice of breathing. Breathing is the clearest index of our inner consciousness. By watching a person's breathing it can very easily be discovered what the nature of his consciousness is. A person whose breath is audible to others, whose breathing is heavy, coarse, rough or shallow, is of a crude mentality. A certain kind of short breathing is a sign of short life.

The truth is that any disturbance of the mind is at once signalized by the disturbance of our breathing. When we are upset, angry, or under the influence of any passion, we find that our breathing has become shallow and irregular. The reverse is the sign of poise and tranquillity. By making the breath flow deeply and regularly, we can easily control the disturbed condition.

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The science of right breathing is taught as an accessory means for the practice of meditation. The following is the most fundamental, vital and essential breathing exercise which a student of meditation must practise every day:

First Breathing Exercise

Breathe in deeply, exercising the entire power of the lungs, and without making any sound. Then, without holding the breath, exhale as gently and slowly as the breath was taken in, maintaining the same rhythm.

Rhythm has a good deal to do with the welfare and advancement of our physical, emotional, and spiritual life. Anything done in rhythm has a soothing and restful effect on the system; whereas, breaking of rhythm at once creates chaos and confusion. For that reason, the metronome of breathing should not be allowed to become disturbed. By breathing deeply and rhythmically we can get rid of many physical and mental disturbances.

The science of breathing has been studied and experimented upon very minutely by the Hindu Yogis, They have gone so far as to find out different breathing exercises suitable for the success and right enjoyment of all our human activities. The five human organs of action, namely, speech, manipulation, locomotion, elimination and propagation, can be effectively regulated and controlled, say the yogis, by the practice of different kinds of breathing.

Second Breathing Exercise

Sit in the correct posture, as previously discussed. Close your right nostril with the thumb of your right hand and draw in the breath, slowly and gently, through the left nostril. Count four times on the fingers of the left hand as you do this. Use the word 'Om' pronounced A-u-m, as the unit. That is,

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four Oms for this part of the exercise. Then, close the left nostril also, with the ring and middle fingers of the right hand. Hold the breath with both nostrils closed, counting Om sixteen times on the fingers of the left hand. Release the right nostril and breathe out slowly and gently, counting Om eight times.

Again, without any interval, reverse the exercise, breathing in first through the right nostril, holding the two, and then releasing the breath through the left nostril. The counting of the Oms is the same, four, sixteen, eight. This is a complete *pranayama*. Continue this exercise, alternating from one nostril to the other. Do this exercise about three times, twice a day. If you wish to increase the duration do so at the ratio of 4-16-8. That is, for instance, 6-24-12. However, one should increase this slowly so that no strain is felt.[1]

I have mentioned before, the current that rises in the spine. The channel in the spine is called the *sushumna*. There are two currents on either side of this, known as the *ida* (pronounced 'eeda') and the *pingala*. These will be fully discussed later on. In doing the breathing exercise just described, make a strong suggestion to yourself while you are holding the breath, with both nostrils closed, that the energy

1 It is unwise to exceed the number of *pranayamas* mentioned by the Swami, or to proceed to a higher count than the basic one mentioned by him, without expert guidance. The reason for this customary warning is often doubted; it is that *pranayama* artificially rouses energy latent in the system. If the aspirant is not sufficiently developed to control this energy it may, in some cases and under certain conditions, play havoc with him, mentally, morally or physically. Lest it should be thought that one is losing something by not practising *pranayama* (in the sense of breathing exercises), it should be noted that all spiritual disciplines lead to spontaneous *pranayama* (in the full sense of control of the *prana*, or energy, operating at the psychical and physical levels), and to the rousing of latent spiritual energy; but they do it in a safe and natural, though more gradual, way.—*Eds.*

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(not the breath) that you are holding has been pushed down to the base of the spine where the three currents of *ida, pingala*, and *sushumna* meet. Feel that there, at the base of the *sushumna*, the energy is pressing hard in order to open this canal, which has been closed, or blocked up. Practise this *pranayama* especially before your fourth meditation, if you are practising at the four junctions which we have already discussed. Try to practise it twice a day before your meditation.

Third Breathing Exercise

The following exercise has been praised by the yogis as one which brings great attractiveness of personality, a spirit of universal friendliness, cheerfulness of disposition, physical beauty, sweetness of voice and longevity. The exercise is very simple and can be done at any time.

Put your lips in the position of whistling. Then draw in the breath slowly, to the full extent of your lung capacity. Close the lips, swallow, and then gradually exhale through both nostrils, keeping the mouth closed. This exercise may be done as many times during the day as it suits you. When you are out in the open it is of great benefit. It also gives you the power of keeping your spirit above depression, dejection, sorrow, discouragement and complexes of all kinds.

Of course, there are many details in the study of breath control which I have not gone into. But I should like to remind you again that there are details in everything. When the fundamental principle is grasped one can adjust oneself according to the environment he finds himself in. In general, the most vital and beneficial exercise of breathing is to make your breathing deep and rhythmical. When that has been accomplished, meditation will be very easy and will proceed without much disturbance. Our object is not to be able to

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breathe in different fashions, but to be able to calm the mind and the body so that they do not interfere with our main objective, which is meditation.

Awakening of the Kundalini

Before we take up the discussion of the *kundalini*, I should like to tell you something about the philosophy on which these meditations are based.

The entire teachings of the six schools of Hindu philosophy are summed up in one sentence: 'Each soul is potentially divine; the goal is to manifest that divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal' (Vivekananda). It is the final conclusion of all the different schools of Hindu philosophy, as well as the different systems of occult sciences, that whatever we want to attain in our life is contained within us. The infinite source of supply, not only of spiritual states but also of material things, is within us. If only we could know how to put ourselves in touch with that eternal source we would not stand in need of anything in life. All our needs, all our demands, hopes and aspirations, could be fulfilled from within.

With this philosophy as their basic principle the different schools of Yoga found out ways and means for the awakening of that divinity within. It is not a question of acquisition; it is not a question of the attainment of something which you do not possess, but it is one of awakening or *unfoldment*, that has been discussed by all the different schools of philosophy and experimented upon by the different systems of Yoga. So I would ask you to remember this definite conclusion, that the highest state of perfection which you want to attain is lying within you, just as the potentialities of the growth of the gigantic tree are contained within the little seed. Whatever we want to attain in the state of our full

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growth is already contained within us in the form of a very subtle potentiality. The question is how to bring this potential seed of perfection into the state of manifestation. Here comes the special method of Yoga which we are now considering and which is embodied in the Tantra philosophy.

I shall try to give you a very brief account of this philosophy. Many of you are acquainted with the name of Patanjali, the great authority on Raja Yoga. It is believed that he lived after Buddha and before Christ, probably somewhere between the 3rd and the 5th centuries B.C. In his Aphorisms we find just an incidental reference to the processes involved in the Tantra system of Yoga. But coming to a much later period, about 600 or 700 A.D., we find that a distinct school of mysticism had been developed, called the Tantra school of philosophy. The word 'Tantra' means 'rules to govern'. The Tantra has a vast literature. There are sixty-four books bearing the general title 'Tantra' and dealing with the same line of thinking. We do not know who the founder of this system was. By going through the Tantra texts, carefully and critically, one is convinced of the fact that this esoteric school of practical philosophy existed even in Vedic times and was handed down uninterruptedly throughout the ages. Some of the Tantric texts date from the time of the Brahmanical revival, after the decay and downfall of Buddhism. In many of the later Tantras there is evidence of a distinct attempt to re-establish the Vedic and Upanishadic religions that had fallen into disuse owing to the ascendancy of Buddhism, which had swayed the whole of India from one corner to the other.

We might briefly compare the Tantra philosophy with other systems. The ultimate Reality, which is called Brahman by the Vedantists and Purusha by the Samkhyas, is called Shiva by the Tantrics. According to Vedanta, the power of

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Brahman, by which Brahman manifests the universe (or appears to), is *maya*. In the Samkhya philosophy it is known as *prakriti* and in the Tantras it is called Shakti, or power. The object of the Tantrics is to experience the unity of Shakti and Shiva, the ultimate Reality, or to achieve the unitary experience, of existence. The Tantrics believe that it is by the power of Shakti that they are able to realize Shiva. They do not, therefore, try to negate the creative power, as the Vedantists do, but rather, to worship it and through it to reach Shiva, the state of Absolute consciousness. Shakti is called the Divine Mother of the universe. The teachings of the Tantras have permeated the ancient Hindu religion (Brahmanism) and it is especially prevalent in the north-eastern part of India.

The system of the Tantras, being an esoteric system of Yoga, always had a tinge of mystery and secrecy about it, and it was greatly misunderstood, even in India. When anything is secret the human mind always imagines something destructive, rather than constructive, about it. This is a weakness of the mind. People in general never knew very much about the contents of the texts of the Tantras, which were written in a sort of code language. As India will ever remain grateful to Max Muller for his work on the Vedic texts, so will the name of Sir John Woodroffe, who was once Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, always be cherished in India with honour for his monumental work of bringing out the worm-eaten, palm-leaf manuscripts of the Tantras. He collected all the available manuscripts, engaged several Hindu scholars to decipher the hidden meaning of the texts, and then had them translated, edited and printed in English. It was a work of devotion to the ideals taught by the Tantra philosophy, which he held in very high esteem. Sir John Woodroffe, who wrote under the pseudonym of Arthur

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Avalon, contributed several well-known books on the Tantra philosophy.

As I mentioned before, the fundamental and essential truth accepted by all the different branches of Hindu philosophy and Yoga, including the Tantra, is that man is potentially divine and that religion and Yoga consist in finding out ways and means which, when properly followed, bring that potential perfection into full manifestation. As the result, Hindu *rishis* discovered and taught several methods of procedure, each of which is called a yoga.

By means of their observation and experiment the *rishis* of the Tantra school discovered that the potentiality of perfection lies within a man in the form of a very subtle spiritual germ, or seed. The ancients used to think and talk in terms of beautiful similes, metaphors, and deep and suggestive figures of speech. Accepting the metaphor of a sleeping serpent, they described this 'germ' of potential perfection by the word, *kundalini*. The etymological meaning of the word is, 'the coiled-up one'. When a serpent is in a state of inertia, or long rest, it coils itself up and remains in the form of a bundle. It appears then that there is no life in the serpent. But are we to understand that the powerful serpent is dead? No, it will awaken and will rise up again. That is the state of its full expression; the previous condition was its potential, latent, unexpressed state. So, the technical term, *kundalini shakti,* which has been translated by many as 'the serpent power', is only a metaphorical expression. In our modern language it could very well be translated by the scientific expression, potential power. When this philosophy was established, humanity had not yet developed the facility of scientific expressions. The idea contained in the modern word 'potentiality' was expressed in a symbolic manner. To my mind there could not be any more poetic or

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any more beautiful symbolism than the coiled-up state of a sleeping serpent to denote the idea contained in our modern term, potentiality.

However, the use of the words 'serpent power' in translating this expression is responsible for the many ridiculous misconceptions concerning it. Many people are entirely misinformed about the theory. They think that it is a dangerous process. It seems that some people even think the *kundalini* is the sleeping monster of the fairy tales! I should like to make this point absolutely clear, that there is no danger in awakening our potential perfection. In fact, it is a pity that we do not know how to do so. Gods we are! But by allowing our divinity to sleep for eternity we have become mere worms of the earth.

According to this system of philosophy and Yoga there is a centre at the base of the spine where this potential energy, or *kundalini*, lies dormant. The theory is, that all the different forms of energy that we conserve or manifest in our lives travel through three special channels called *nadis*, which are located within the spine. Through the middle of the spine, from the base all the way straight up to the brain centres, runs the *sushumna*, the subtlest and the most important of three. Encircling this middle one, in the form of a figure eight, are the two others. The left-hand side of this figure eight, including the top cross-section to the right, is called *ida*. The opposite half is called *pingala*.

These three channels meet thrice, at the base of the spine, at the neck, and at the place between the eyebrows. At the base, the channel of the *ida* and the *pingala* joins with another passage, the *sushumna*; whereas, at the other two junctions the currents cross without admitting any passage through one another. (See Figure 3). In the average person the passage through the *sushumna* is entirely blocked.

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The energy runs only through the *ida* and the *pingala,* in the form of the figure eight. The matter which blocks the upward passage of the *sushumna* is the dormant state of the *kundalini.*

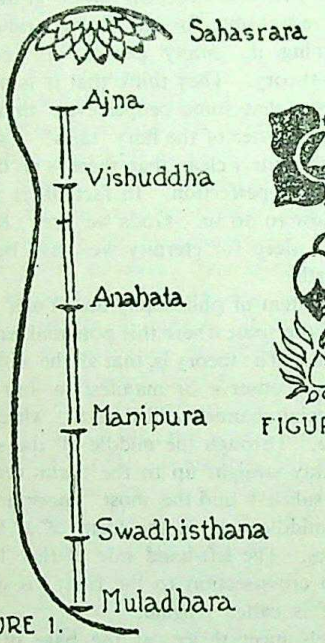

FIGURE 1.

FIGURE 2.

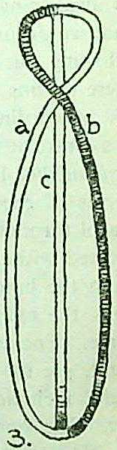

FIGURE 3.

In fact, it should not be a called 'matter'; it is a very subtle form of potential energy. At the base, the channel of the *ida* and the *pingala* may be compared to a U-shaped tube having a third channel in the middle, meeting the U at the curve. Imagine that some sediment has blocked the passage through the middle, leaving only the U-shaped conduit

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open. That is the condition of the average person, so far as the opening of this passage is concerned. This 'sediment', or spiritual substance which blocks the passage of the *sushumna*, is the undeveloped state of our spirituality. The endeavour of the yogi is to open the middle channel by means of certain practices in breathing and meditation.

We discussed the special breathing exercise (No. 2) for opening the *sushumna* in the previous talk. That exercise has been prescribed for the awakening of the *kundalini* As soon as the *kundalini* is stirred up, something like a combustion takes place which generates, in a very subtle spiritual sense, heat and light at the base of the *sushumna*. With the awakening of the *kundalini* the yogi actually feels a unique and soothing heat and light at the base of his spine. The awakened *kundalini* is then made to travel upwards by means of a highly symbolic form of meditation which unfolds higher and higher spiritual qualities in man.

This process of unfolding the higher qualities of man has been beautifully symbolized with the help of a very poetic and significant metaphor; that is, to the blooming of the lotus flower. After the lotus blooms it remains fresh on its stalk for a long time; but every evening as the sun goes down it closes and droops. Again, with the rising of the sun the next morning it straightens up and gradually manifests full bloom and beauty again. This beautiful and suggestive natural phenomenon was studied by the sages and accepted as a unique symbol of the unfolding of the spiritual qualities of man, with the advent of the light of understanding in his personality. As this light of the *kundalini* travels upwards through the *sushumna* it touches and illumines the different centres, or *chakras*, which are symbolized in the form of lotuses. Before the advent of the light of the *kundalini* all these lotuses remained drooping, so to say, heads down,

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wilted and faded. But as soon as the light of the *kundalini* touches a lotus it straightens up and attains full bloom and beauty. (See Figure 2.) Thus, the light of the *kundalini* proceeds higher and higher, bringing 'into bloom' various stages of unfoldment in man, until it transcends all the planes of consciousness and enters into the superconscious, or transcendental, plane. This is symbolized by a thousand-petalled lotus located in the brain centres. This is conceived as an ocean of infinite Light, Knowledge, Existence, and Bliss, The little light of the *kundalini*, travelling all the way up. becomes merged in that infinite ocean of Light in the thousand-petalled lotus, which marks the realization of the highest state of *samadhi*.

Allow me to digress for a moment. As many of you know, Shri Ramakrishna followed this system of meditation for some time. You know, he followed every practice and realized every main religion to prove that they are all valid means for attaining spiritual perfection. He often described his experiences to his disciples. Regarding this practice of meditation he described how the *kundalini* made its way upwards. He said that sometimes he felt the upward current was like the movement of a bird, hopping from one centre to another. Sometimes it was like the movement of a fish in water, and at other times like the swinging of a monkey from branch to branch of a tree. By practising all the different paths Shri Ramakrishna brought out their essentials and cleansed them of their dross. The Tantra system of Yoga had fallen into disrepute, owing to the weakness of those who taught and practised it. Shri Ramakrishna vindicated this system of meditation and set it up again in its rightful place as a pure and noble form of spiritual practice. He proved, by following it himself, that one could reach the highest spiritual goal through these practices of meditation.

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Now I shall give you the exercise for bringing forth the potential perfection within.

Fourth Meditation Exercise

Sit on your regular meditation seat, in the correct posture, as previously discussed. Then slowly and gently do the breathing exercise as described under Breathing Exercise No. 2. At the same time visualize a luminous channel running all the way from the base of the spine to the brain centres. Feel that by means of your breathing exercise, and by the power of your thought, the passage at the bottom of this channel has been cleared and a constant stream of spiritual energy is running into it from the U-shaped conduit, formed by the junction of the *ida* and the *pingala.* This inrush of the current has awakened the *kundalini,* which has taken the form of a small, white, lucid, but soft and soothing, light, like the flame of a candle. This light is slowly travelling upwards through the channel of the *sushumna.*

It touches and illumines the first centre, symbolized by a lotus but located at the place within the *sushumna* a little higher than the base. This centre is called the *muladhara.* As soon as the light touches it, the drooping lotus bud straightens up and opens, showing its beautiful *four* petals in brilliant *red.* There is a disc inside which is also of the same colour (See Figure 2.).

Next, visualize the light of the *kundalini* travelling further up, slowly and gently, until it comes to the next centre located within the *sushumna,* corresponding to the place of the genital organ. This centre is known as the *svadhisthana.* The wilted and drooping lotus bud of this centre is touched and illumined by the light. The bud opens, showing its *six* petals around the disc in *vermilion* colour.

Leaving this lotus, proceed upwards with the light

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of the *kundalini*. It ascends to the next centre which is located at the place corresponding to the navel. The *manipura* which is the name of this centre, has a lotus of *ten* petals, *scarlet* in colour, and a disc of the same hue. The light of the *kundalini* makes the wilted bud stand upright on its stem, healthy, bright and beautiful.

The light of the *kundalini* travels further up and reaches the region corresponding to the place of the heart. There, it touches and illumines the next lotus bud, and brings it into a state of perfect health, bloom and beauty. The *twelve*-petalled *anahata*[1] is unfolded in *brilliant blue,* manifesting wonderful spiritual qualities in the personality of the yogi.

Farther up travels the light. It comes to the region of the *vishuddha,* located in the place corresponding to the neck. Again, the drooping lotus bud is touched and illumined

1 When instructing Uddhava in how to meditate (see *Last Message of Shri Krishna*, translated by Swami Madhavananda), Shri Krishna says that the deity—the object of meditation—should be thought of as seated in the lotus of the heart, which has *eight* petals. This lotus is not the *anahata chakra of twelve* petals mentioned by Swami Gnaneswarananda, but a lotus known as the *anandakanda* (see *Mahanirvana Tantra*, 5.5.132 translated by Sir John Woodroffe under the title *Tantra of the Great Liberation*). The *eight*-petalled *anandakanda* lotus, red in colour, is below the pericarp of the *twelve*-petalled *anchata*. Here, according to the Tantra just cited, the Chosen Deity is to be meditated upon and mentally worshipped. It would seem that Shri Krishna refers to the *anandakanda*. The eight petals, we have been told, symbolize the eight occult powers.

Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) translates an authoritative description of the *chakras* in his book, *The Serpent Power*. In distinction from what the Swami says in this chapter, the *manipura* Woodroffe says, is of the colour of a rain-cloud; the *anahata*, of the colour of the *bandhuka* flower (i.e., scarlet); and the *vishuddha* is smoky purple. There is some variation in the detailed descriptions of the *chakras*, and thus the Swami's account is slightly at variance with that given in the Tantras translated by Sir John Woodroffe.—*Eds.*

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by the light of the *kundalini*. Slowly and gently it stands up on its steam and attains full bloom. The open lotus shows *sixteen* beautiful petals, and the disc is *light grey* in colour. With the unfoldment of this plane of consciousness, marvellous spiritual qualities are manifested in the personality of the yogi. The whole system is surcharged and saturated with the joy of the unfoldment of this mystic centre.

Higher travels the light. It comes to the region corresponding to the place between the eyebrows. The *ajna* unfolds by the touch of the divine light of the *kundalini*. The wilted bud stands up. It opens, sending out a radiance of wonderful light. The beautiful *white* colour of this *two*-petalled lotus is distinctly visible in this centre, and the effulgent light emanating from it stands in the form of a beautiful aura around the head.

With the unfoldment of this state of consciousness, the yogi feels the supreme bliss of divine understanding and penetration into the deep mysteries of the universe. He stands face to face with the truth. There is nothing which he does not know. His whole being is illuminated with the light of knowledge. He is the divine manifestation of Absolute Knowledge, in flesh and blood. It gives him a wonderful sense of joy to realize his unity with the All-knowing One. But still there is a little distinction. The subject-and-object consciousness still remains; the yogi knows the truth but he is still distinct from it. The truth is his 'object' of perception, and he is the 'subject' of it.

The light of the *kundalini* travels still higher and leaves the channel of the *sushumna*. In the brain centre is the place of the *sahasrara*, or the *thousand*-petalled lotus, which is the symbol of the transcendental state of Absolute Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss. Visualize the transcendental state in the form of an ocean of light, brilliant and effulgent, but

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cool, soothing and peaceful. As soon as the little light of the *kundalini* leaves the channel of the *sushumna* it enters into this ocean of light. Just as a little drop of water falling into the waters of the infinite ocean becomes one with and inseparable from the ocean; likewise, the finite light of the *kundalini* becomes one with the infinite Light of absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

When you reach this point in your meditation, feel that your little 'I', your small ego, your limited personality, has transcended all its limits. You have no body, no mind, no friend or foe. You are the Absolute principle. You have no birth, no disease, no death; no happiness, no suffering, no pain. You are beyond all pairs of opposites. You are Infinite Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

Make the following affirmation:

'I am neither the body nor the mind. I am that infinite and universal principle. I have no friend or foe. I have no pleasure or pain. I am that absolute, changeless, deathless, eternal and infinite Truth. I am above all pairs of opposites. Nothing can touch me. Nothing else exists. I am the All, the All is in me. I am That. I am That.'

Remain in this state of consciousness as long as you can. Then take up the final meditation, which will be discussed in the next talk. Meantime, I should like to explain the significance of the different *chakras,* or centres.

As I mentioned earlier, the lotuses we have been speaking of are symbolic. Do not, for a moment, think that I am talking of the lotus in any tangible form. These symbols of lotuses stand for the different stages through which the soul passes on its journey towards infinite Perfection. These *chakras,* or lotus centres are, therefore, different *stages of consciousness.* The first one, *muladhara,* meaning the basic receptacle, is the place (symbolically speaking) where all

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our past *samskaras* or experiences rest. It is the place where the crystallized *karma* of all our previous incarnations is lying, in a potential state. If one can gain absolute control over this centre he will be able to remember everything concerning his previous lives.

The second centre, or the *sradhishthana,* which means the home of the lower self, is the fountainhead of all our animal forces, which can be spiritualized and used for our best advantage by gaining absolute control over this centre.

The third centre, the *manipura,* which literally means the city of jewels, marks the climax of all material enjoyment, power, name, fame, health, physical beauty and prosperity; in fact, everything one can think of attaining in this world, with the knowledge of its spiritual value. One must be convinced that worldly things cannot bring any satisfaction to the soul. Examining their value, one must throw them away like lumps of dirt, and rise higher.

Every student should carefully note that until he has transcended the *manipura,* a natural downward current is trying to press the light of the *kundalini* to the base again. So, up to this centre the work of the yogi is more or less uphill. He is not secure until he is able to rise above this centre. There is every possibility of his getting attached to certain phenomena which might appear before him in very alluring forms, throwing him down to a state of pitiful darkness. For that reason, the yogi must keep ablaze the torch of discrimination until he rises above *manipura.* However, as soon as the spiritual current reaches the next centre, the *anahata,* there is a natural upward current in his favour. The yogi is comparatively safe at this stage.

The *anahata* means the uncaused or the unagitated. As soon as he comes to this stage of unfoldment man becomes

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highly spiritual. He carries a message of love, friendship, helpfulness, forgiveness, peace and fellowship to all beings. His love and goodness do not depend upon any objective condition of return or reciprocity. It is his nature to be good, since he is all love. The sun cannot shed darkness, nor does it want any return from the objects it illumines. The unfoldment of this state is, therefore, called the unagitated, or the uncaused. In all kinds of physical manifestation there is a stimulus or agitation which causes the expression in the subject. But, in the case of this person, his love, benevolence and friendship flow ceaselessly, without being caused by anything. He is love and goodness 'in flesh and blood', and radiates them spontaneously wherever he is. His personality is attractive and fascinating. With the opening of the lotus of the heart, man expresses the love of God, the love of man, and the love of his self, all three in one, everywhere and for everything.

The *vishuddha*, which means extremely pure, brings into manifestation in the personality of the yogi pure beauty, pure goodness and pure truth. He becomes an artist of the highest order. Everything that comes from him creates beauty and goodness. In short, he has become the joy and beauty of the world around him.

The *ajna*, which means the 'all-knowing', is the stage when the yogi unfolds absolute knowledge. There is nothing in this universe or elsewhere, in the present, past or future, which he does not know. There is absolutely no limit to his understanding. Knowledge is satisfaction; knowledge is freedom; knowledge is bliss. Therefore, the yogi enjoys absolute freedom, satisfaction and bliss in this state of unfoldment. But there is still a little limitation which he must surpass. He knows everything, just as one knows things that are locked up within a glass case. You see everything but

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you cannot touch it. You know everything at this stage of consciousness but you *are* not 'that', as yet.

In the final state, which is called the *sahasrara,* that little distinction between the Self and the not-Self vanishes. The little drop of water is merged in the ocean, and becomes one and inseparable from it. This is the state known as *nirvikalpa samadhi,* to describe which all language fails. This is the experience which has never become 'second-hand'. This state has been described by Shri Ramakrishna in a very beautiful poetic simile:

A little salt doll once wanted to fathom the depth of the ocean. It went down to the water's edge, stepped in, and, being dissolved in the water of the ocean, it melted away, becoming one with the ocean and inseparable from it. It could never come back to tell its story!

Your little self, your mortal, limited individuality, expands to infinity, expresses the All and becomes one with the Absolute. You go beyond time, space, and causation. You assert your divine nature, your pristine glory, your infinite bliss. This is known as the complete awakening of the *kundalini.* Everything that you then experience—the unspeakable beatitude of *satchitananda* Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute—was fundamentally contained in your nature. It unfolded, gradually, through the different stages, and finally reaped its richest harvest in the *sahasrara.*

Without any doubt, hesitation, or fear, but in a cheerful and a happy state of mind, a student should practise this meditation at least twice each day. Even during his other occupations, he is required to keep an undercurrent of spiritual memory strong within himself. Practising in this way for about two years, the yogi realizes a wonderful change in his whole personality. Then, gradually, he may select one of the three upper lotuses as his favourite. He may manifest

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himself mostly through the *anahata,* the *vishuddha,* or the *ajna.* He may come to such an understading that at will he can command the unfoldment of any one of these three to make his expression or actions manifest the predominance either of wisdom, beauty or love. At times, the yogi wishes to manifest the power of wisdom in some of his endeavours. If he can hold his consciousness on the plane of the *ajna* all his expressions will manifest the force of wisdom. He will fascinate and control the whole world by the spell of his brilliant understanding. If he controls the *vishuddha,* his manifestations will excel in the creation of artistic beauty. Whatever he does will express itself in the form of the most exquisite art. When he holds his consciousness at the *anahata,* he spreads the charm of pure love all around him.

To begin with, do not meditate long on the three lower centres, but go through them slowly without stopping. After practising for about two years one does not have to go through every step of the process, but can place his consciousness on any one of the higher three centres, and gradually ascend to the *sahasrara.* But a beginner must follow the entire process regularly, twice a day, from beginning to end for a period of at least two years. And, remember, it is not dangerous to arouse the *kundalini.* In fact, until it is aroused man is just like any bird or beast. Animals also eat, drink, sleep and beget. If such is the only symbol and sign of life what distinction is there between a brute and a human being? There is only the degree of the awakening of that potential power that distinguishes a man from a beast. To the extent and degree that a man's *kundalini* has been awakened, he is higher than other species. The more one rises in the unfoldment of that inner state of potentiality, the wiser, the holier and the stronger than the rest he is. So do not, for a moment, cherish the misconception that it is dangerous to arouse

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the *kundalini,* or the latent spiritual power within yourself.

Everything that you experience in the highest state of spiritual unfoldment is contained within you. It is by practice, and constant practice, that these states are reached. The secret lies in your practice alone. Unless and until one experiences these steps and stages there is no way of verifying the truth. There is abounding beauty and incessant bliss on the way, so begin your practices without any hesitation. Begin now. If we do not attain to this highest state, pity on us all, for the human incarnation is the only state of existence where we have the power to bring into manifestation this absolute perfection.

Do not try to mystify anything; do not try to create any haze around this philosophy. If there is a little doubt in your mind, do not hesitate, but go on with your practice. All doubts will vanish as you proceed. Your practice is the only means which will finally convince you of the truth.

Good Will to All

The maxim of the Hindu view of life was always: 'For the good of all, for the gain of all'. Consequently, the success of every activity of human life was considered from the highest utilitarian standard, as to how much good it brought to all, instead of to the doer alone. The utilitarian standard of ethics which we discuss in the present age had its origin in remote times. Then it was understood in a much broader sense, including all beings within its scope. It was carried to such an extreme by the early Hindus that the standard was applied even in the matter of cooking food. If food was cooked only for an individual person or family it was considered impure. A portion of the food was to be set apart, to be distributed (sometimes symbolically) to the

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five great worlds from whom so much benefit is received for our existence.

These great benefactors are: the world of the unseen *devas*, or gods, and higher beings who are supposed to have some control over human welfare; the world of the *rishis*, or the seers of truth, from whom we have inherited all ancient knowledge and wisdom; the world of the *pitris*, or the departed forefathers, whose names we bear and whose prestige, honour and dignity we inherit; the human world; the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.

If you were the only human being on this earth, what kind of a life could you lead? You would be no better than a cave-man or a savage forest-dweller. So, we owe a heavy debt to the world at large, and daily we should pay homage and reverence to all, in token of our appreciation. Therefore, in doing any action we should consider how much benefit it brings to all. If an act of piety, a religious exercise, or spiritual practice, brings benefit only to the agent, it is to be considered selfish, and for that matter it is no longer spiritual. On the other hand, any endeavour which brings benefit to many, whatever may be the nature of the act, has always been considered spiritual. According to that standard of cosmic utility, even one's religious practice should be performed in such a spirit that the results may be shared by all beings. In India, at the conclusion of any spiritual practice or religious ceremony, a special ritual is performed which sends the fruits of the action to all directions in the universe, so that all creatures may derive benefit from the good act. Even after going through all the different steps in the time-honoured procedure of meditation the concluding process must be a *renunciation of the fruits of the exercise*. The yogi does not want any personal benefit from the practice of his meditation. If any benefit is to be derived, let it

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go for the advancement, the happiness and prosperity of all.

Those people who believe in a personal God, or who meditate on the form of a Deity, offer the fruits of their meditation to God, with the words: 'Thou art the soul and the basic reality of every being that is, was, or will be. By offering the fruits of my meditation to Thee, I offer them to all. May it please Thee to grant peace, purity, goodness and prosperity to all beings in the universe.'

Those of a philosophic bent of mind, who do not care for a personal ideal but consider themselves as the fountain-head of all good thoughts, meditate on the idea that from their consciousness constant streams of uplifting thoughts are pouring out all around on the visible and the invisible universe, reaching the hearts of all beings. Under all circumstances, we must renounce all expectation of results from our practice of meditation. If any results are to come, let them be shared by all.

When we act for others we manifest our inner spiritual perfection in a more pronounced way. When *we give* we are great spiritually. When we *beg*, no matter what it is for, we always become small. The ocean of our spiritual perfection 'dwindles down into a mere drop' at the very idea of begging. Suppose, because of poverty, a self-respecting person has gone down into a state of extreme hunger and suffering. I doubt if he could approach the door of a rich person to ask for food. But, if he finds another at the point of death from starvation, he can very well beg for food for the man, without feeling humiliated at all. In fact, a great spiritual strength and power will be manifest in his personality in the realization that he is *giving*. Simply by the force of his love and sympathy he will be able to inspire others to come forward to render the necessary material assistance.

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If we give these facts some thought we shall easily convince ourselves that whatever we do for our own benefit undermines our spiritual strength. In a very subtle way it makes us feel small and humiliated. But whatever we do for the benefit of others at once kindles the spirit of universality and spiritual strength within us. Therefore, if our meditation and spiritual practices are done only for our own benefit, in the last analysis we do not gain much. If they are performed with the intention of serving others, the little drop of our spirituality multiplies into the ocean.

It is absolutely necessary to develop an altruistic attitude regarding your meditation. Do not look forward to any results—how much progress you have made in the course of a few months or years, what you have gained, and how much more there is to come to you. If we always keep a part of our mind engaged in the calculation of our gain and loss in our meditation, it can at best be a business enterprise, but not a spiritual practice, not a method of spiritual unfoldment. A student should forget all about results.

It has been my unshakeable conviction that the greatest amount and degree of service that one can render can only be in the realm of thought. There is a common saying that 'thoughts are things'. In my estimation, thoughts are even more potent, substantial and permanent than mere things. If you give a coin or a car to another it will be spent, lost, exhausted or worn out before long. But if you can give your genuine good thoughts to him it brings more benefit than anything else. Owing to our gross and materialistic impatience, we fail to appreciate the value of thoughts. With higher unfoldment we come to understand that we can help the world more by creating spiritual vibrations of thoughts, than by offering any material thing.

Very often we come in contact with people who need

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help. It is not possible for us, no matter how affluent we may be, to supply the material needs of all those persons. Because of this a spiritual-minded person feels some disturbance in his mind, and that disturbance hampers his progress. As a remedy for the disturbances that arise because of the sufferings of others, this special exercise should be practised: raise a very powerful thought-vibration during every meditation sending out a current of love and goodwill for all beings.

In the first place, you will find that at least the worry you used to feel because of the sufferings of others will be gone. You will enjoy a more calm and peaceful state of mind. Secondly, viewing the matter from an objective angle, it can be established that those needy persons actually get the help which you send them in the form of your good thoughts. Many people raise the objection that by sending out a good thought for a hungry person you might solve your own problem. You might feel calm and peaceful yourself, but does the hungry person get that piece of bread he needs so badly? With all the emphasis at my command I insist that, in bringing the much-needed material relief as well, such thought-vibrations are far more potent than mere material assistance. It is one of my strongest convictions that even a hungry man does not suffer so much from the want of a piece of bread as he does from the lack of a spiritual state of consciousness which would place him far above all sufferings. This consciousness undoubtedly receives some unfoldment from the sincere good thoughts of a spiritual benefactor. Moreover, it has been found that the powerful thoughts of a spiritual person are caught by others having the material resources and they feel the urge to supply the material need. The goodwill of the yogis and other spiritually-advanced persons are contacted imperceptibly by people who are in a position to help the poor and the needy.

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Of course such a practice is beneficial subjectively as well, and from one standpoint, the subjective benefit is to be considered the most important of all. I do not know if, in the future history of the world, a time will ever come when, objectively, all needs, sufferings and sorrows will be abolished. Probably they will remain as long as creation lasts. But any person can get out of the consciousness of suffering by means of higher spiritual understanding. The remedy will always be a subjective one. If we can rise above the consciousness of sufferings, subjectively, and help others to do the same, we shall be solving the deepest problem of the world.

I am reminded of a very beautiful incident recorded in the life of the great American, Abraham Lincoln. The story is told that one day he was out on horseback with some of his army chiefs. Looking ahead on the road he saw a little insect lying on its back and trying very hard to get on its feet again. Hearing the sound of the horses' hoofs the helpless little insect became almost frantic. It was in a desperate and terrible frenzy. Lincoln saw this and at once stopped. He got down from his horse, took the little creature in his hands, set it on its feet again in a safe place off the road, and mounted his horse. One of the army chiefs asked him, 'What is the meaning of doing that?' With a smile Lincoln replied, 'Now I *feel* very much better'.

This is the real spiritual benefit which one derives from service of any kind. One *feels much better* subjectively. Whatever we give without hope of return comes back to us multiplied a thousandfold. I do not mean to say that we should send out our goodwill to the universe with the hope of getting it back a thousandfold, because that, again, would only be begging. When one performs any good act, only because he cannot help it, never thinking about the returns, it brings very rich results for his happiness and spiritual advancement.

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Psychologically speaking, such an attitude of looking forward for results makes a person impatient and very easily irritable. We should consider our practice as its own benefit. Instead of thinking of it as a means to an end, consider it as the end itself. Of course those who practise for the attainment of results do attain them. But as soon as they get interested in certain powers or some psychic phenomena they lose all excellence of character. Eventually, they find themselves in a deplorable and utterly mean and degraded condition.

A student of Yoga must banish from his heart the idea of gaining, by his practice of Yoga, power or proficiency in any material realm whatsoever. In the course of practice certain phenomena of a supernatural nature may appear to him, but when one stops there all further progress is barred. These phenomena or powers should be considered as so many milestones by the side of the highway of spiritual progress. A traveller, speeding by, looks at them and realizes that he is making good progress towards his goal. But if he stops at every milestone, fusses around and jumps with joy at his great achievement, it will be impossible for him to proceed. So, don't stop! Don't try to show off. Don't be vain, and don't talk about your unusual experiences.

May I remind you, do your practice without hope of return from any quarter, without even thinking of what you are gaining from it. Do it for the good of the many, for the benefit of the many. Do it to *feel* good. Then you will miss it if you do not practise. Make your spiritual exercises the very breath of your nostrils.

Fifth Meditation Exercise

After performing the other steps of your meditation always close your exercise with the following:

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Hold your consciousness at the centre corresponding to the place of the eyebrows. Visualize the two-petalled, white lotus. Feel your unity with the cosmic principle of Ether. Visualize, from the disc of that lotus, a fountain of light issuing forth. It is effulgent, pouring out all over the universe, and vitalizing every being with your spiritual thoughts and the living force of your love, goodwill and fellowship. Make this affirmation:

'I am one with this universe. Cosmic consciousnes is being stirred up by the vibration of my spiritual thoughts. They are immensely powerful, sure and effective. I wish everything good and uplifting for all beings. Let all beings be happy. Let peace, knowledge, truth and love find expression through every atom in the universe. Let the commonwealth of truth be established on earth. Peace, peace, peace be unto all beings.'

Closing Meditation

Let all nature, both internal and external, be surcharged and saturated with the cosmic vibration of universal peace, love and friendship. Let the winds blow in all directions carrying from us the message of faith and understanding to all beings in the universe. Let the rivers *flow*, singing to all the sweetest melody of universal tolerance and acceptance. Let the sun overhead bathe us with the light of appreciation and service. Let evenings and dawns, earth and sky, mountains and forests, beasts and birds, be filled and inspired with the sacred feeling of brotherhood. Let every breath that flows from us create a strong current of universal and divine service for all beings.

Peace be unto us and all beings in the universe.

Om Tat Sat

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CHAPTER 4

The Science of Mantra or the Sacred Word

Swami Ghanananda

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1. THE PRACTICE

All religious disciplines are calculated to give man the necessary concentration on the Divine and ultimately take him to the goal. They cleanse and intensify the faculties of his mind—knowing, feeling and willing—and help him to throw himself into his spiritual pursuit with great ardour. When this takes place, he finds his concentration becomes deeper and deeper until he is able to focus his undivided mind on the Divine.

The spiritual disciplines which a seeker must undergo in aspiring to realize God fall under three heads: the disciplines of the yoga of Knowledge, those of the yoga of Devotion and those of the yoga of Right Activity, according as his tastes and tendencies are predominantly intellectual, emotional or volitional. Every yoga has its own methodology, its own way of classifying the spiritual disciplines by indicating the different steps in an ascending order of intensity and ardour, which lead to the experience of the goal—either God with attributes, or God the Absolute, the Pure Consciousness beyond the ego and the universe—but all the yogas accept and teach the value of *mantra* (the sacred word).

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The Upanishads in speaking of (1) hearing the truth from the living voice of a qualified teacher, (2) pondering over the truth, and (3) meditating on the truth with a view to realizing it, indicate the three broad stages of approach to the divine goal, the second representing a higher stage than the preceding one, and the third representing a higher stage than the second; but these Upanishads also glorify the *mantra*. Vedantic teachers discuss the four preliminary spiritual disciplines necessary for all followers of the yoga of Knowledge, namely (1) discrimination between the Real and the unreal, (2) cultivation of six virtues such as control of mind, control of senses etc., (3) relinquishment of all desires to enjoy the fruits of action in this world or a heavenly world, and (4) desire for illumination and freedom from the shackles of mind and its desires; but all such teachers also accept the utility of the *mantra*.

Ramanuja, Madhva and other teachers classify the preliminary requisites for spiritual practices differently, and their approaches to the goal are different, but they all uphold the value power of the *mantra*. The *mantra* is glorified not only by the Vedas but also by all the Agamas (the Tantric and other later scriptures). Whereas the Vedas preach the Vedic *mantras*, the Agamas uphold the greatness of the Agamic *mantras*.

A *mantra* is a sacred word or words. It is a mystic sound-symbol of God, and is defined as that by meditating on which a person acquires freedom from sin, enjoyment of heaven and liberation, and by the aid of which he attains the four aims of life (*chaturvarga*).[1] '*Mantra* is so called

1 The four aims of life are *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. *Dharma* is the ethical and spiritual basis of life and in its light should one earn *artha* (wealth) and seek the fulfilment of desires (*kama*). A life thus lived in the light of *dharma* will lead to *moksha* (Liberation).

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because it is achieved by mental process.' *Man of mantra* is the first syllable of *manana* (thinking) and *tra* is the first syllable of *trana* (liberation from the bondages of the phenomenal world). By combining these syllables the word *mantra* is said to be formed, it being that which 'calls forth' (*amantrana*) the four aims of life. It was not invented but discovered in ancient India by the *rishis,* the men of God, in a state of superconsciousness. It was not coined like the words of a language, but arrived at in the course of their spiritual flights by the teachers of the Indo-Aryan fold. In course of time the Indo-Aryans evolved a science of *mantras,* and the science developed through the centuries, though it began in very ancient times. *Mantras* have deeply moulded the spiritual thought and life of India. They have also influenced several countries outside India, particularly Eastern countries, and many people of the West.

Types of Mantras

Mantras are letters arranged in a definite sequence of sounds of which the letters are the representative signs. A Devata is a certain aspect or form of the God-head, which a devotee invokes. As the Godhead has many aspects, there are many Devatas and there are many *mantras.* The *mantra* of any one of them is that letter or combination of letters which reveals that Devata to the consciousness of the devotee who has evoked Him or Her by the power of his spiritual practices. The form of the particular Deity so evoked, therefore, appears out of the particular *mantra.*

Mantra also means 'that which protects'. It serves as a subtle means of protecting man from physical, mental, moral and spiritual dangers. It can protect not only the individual but also the community. In times of fear from sedtilential diseases or alarm caused by impending natural

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cataclysms, a whole village or town sits and invokes divine aid by repeating a *mantra*. You may be surprised to know how often this is successful. It is customary in India to dedicate the family to its tutelary Deity: a room is set apart for worship and becomes a domestic sanctum. It is here that the members of the family, young and old, gather for daily prayers and meditation, as well as for appealing to the Deity for mercy and succour in times of distress or danger. In a similar manner a whole street, a whole village, a whole town is dedicated to its own particular Deity, who is some aspect of the Godhead. In all cases the Deity is invoked according to injunctions, but no worship can be done without repeating the particular *mantra* intended to make His spiritual power manifest. Different aspects of the Godhead have different *mantras*.

Sound precedes the manifestation of form in creation. Since from certain sounds certain forms evolve, every sound is responsible for a particular form. Take a tuning fork and strike it near a cardboard on which fine particles of sand have been spread thinly: the sand particles can be seen arranging themselves in different patterns or geometrical figures. So *mantras* are vibrations, and as such possess both constructive and destructive power. There are constructive, helpful *mantras* and also destructive, harmful ones. Some are conducive to health, mental concentration and moral well-being; others harm the body, confound the mind, and degrade moral life. The Vedas as a rule deal with holy and auspicious ones, although the *mantras* of sorcery and witchcraft can be found in portions of the *Atharva Veda*.

We are therefore concerned with those great and spiritualizing *mantras* that gave illumination and peace in the past and can give them even today—those elevating and ennobling ones which purify body and mind. These are to be learnt

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from the teacher who knows them. Repetition of a *mantra* has always been emphasized by the Indo-Aryan teachers because of its spiritual value and its power to give us the concentration required for meditation.

Every *mantra* has, as we said, a corresponding Deity and this is called its presiding Deity. The *mantra* is the body of that Deity, a particular sound-body of Consciousness —not simply an idea conveyed to or understood by the mind of man, not merely a concatenation of letters carrying a face value of a particular meaning, nor apparently no meaning, at all (as in the case of *bija mantras*).[1] *Mantras* are, in fact intoned and uttered in the proper manner according to letter and rhythm. That is why they cease to be such when translated, for although the idea may be conveyed to the intellect, the power is not expressed. The *mantra* is a veritable mass of radiant energy (*tejas*). It is the Supreme Truth, Brahman Itself, in sound-body. It is without decay. It is not like a teaching or saying of the great ones which conveys advice or counsel, nor a prayer which may be expressed in the words chosen by the man who prays: it awakens superhuman power and ultimately leads man to Divine Consciousness.

It is claimed that these *mantras*, like the later Upanishads, were revealed to the *rishis* or men of God in a type of superconscious state in which the ego is retained—a state in which they saw the *mantras* in a flash of light, or heard them. Be that as it may, they are expressions of high spiritual truths and possess great efficacy.

The Inner Mantra

A *mantra* as uttered consists of sacred sounds and therefore can be given audible expression, which is its gross aspect. But it also has a subtle aspect which can be heard only by

1 Sir John Woodroffe.

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the mental ear. Only when sound is between certain degrees of vibration can it be heard. It is inaudible to us above and below a certain pitch; but the sound exists nevertheless and can be heard by certain beings. So also with *mantras:* there is a subtle state of the *mantra* which can be heard only through proper training and disciplines. What men hear are only the gross sounds. *Mantras* were first taught by those who had heard them in their subtle state and to whom their meaning had been revealed. In this subtle aspect they have been existing eternally, but like the 'music of the spheres' this subtle aspect was not heard by all—not even by those with the keenest hearing—but could be heard only by those with keen minds, that is to say, the mental ears. It was the *rishis* who struggled and practised disciplines intensely for many years who heard them, or *saw* them and hence were called Seers. They saw them in an exalted spiritual state, a high state of consciousness; but when they returned to normal consciousness, they remembered the *mantras* and taught them to their disciples, exhorting them to practise repetition of them, so that they too could reach that exalted spiritual state in which the *mantras* were seen or heard. The journey of those who are taught to practise repetition of a *mantra* in quest of God is like the journey of a man born in the interior of a country, and desirous of seeing the sea: he is given a sea-shell, and told to travel in a certain direction until he comes to a place where sand is strewn with such shells. Then he reaches a vast expanse of water and is able to recognize it as the object of his search.

Meditation and Contemplation

Spiritual truths are better learnt from the living voice than from books. The student has then to reflect on the truths, until he is ripe for meditation. It is meditation that

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enables him to realize and experience the Truth. Before one has access to the living voice of the teacher, one may learn spiritual truths from books. One may also reflect. But in meditation there is no reflection, no discrimination between the Real and the unreal as a deliberate practice, no intellectual cogitation. All these come within the realm of thought. Discrimination and reflection are good and necessary inasmuch as they prepare the mind for meditation, but they are different from meditation.

Even contemplation as known to Christian theology and practice is only a preparation for meditation; it is by no means identical with it. Contemplation may be likened to the buzzing of a bee about the petals of a flower to which it is attracted by its colour: it is preparing to drink the honey, but has not begun to drink it. The actual drinking of honey corresponds to meditation. When an orthodox Christian thinks of the nativity, life, austerities, illumination, ministry crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, he contemplates on them; but he can be said to meditate on Jesus only when his heart is riveted to the Divine Heart, gets caught in the Heart of God—or lets God enter his heart—and remains there for some time.

Now meditation is a vital means to success in one's spiritual life, whether one's main path be Selfless and Dedicated Work, Devotion, Discrimination and Knowledge, or Psychic and Psychological Control. Meditation being extremely difficult, the ancient teachers, on whom we can rely, gave *mantras* to their disciples to help them to purify and concentrate their minds, thereby preparing them for meditation.

Mantras are usually classified as Vedic and Agamic. But to whatever class they may belong, Om is the highest of them all. Om is the one word which is considered to be the essence of all the Vedas, and the one symbol sacred and common not only to the followers of the Vedas, who are

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known as Hindus, but also the Jains, the Buddhists and the Zoroastrians. It was the greatest discovery by the ancient Indo-Aryans in the science of meditation. It was first taught in ancient Vedic times, but it is not a word of the Sanskrit or any other language. It is a sacred sound, a symbol in the most direct sense: it is the highest possible symbol of the Infinite, the nearest possible approach to the Absolute, called Brahman in the Upanishads, which has been the dream and goal of the Hindus all these millenia.

Repetition of the Mantra

Japa means the repetition of a *mantra* with devotion and faith after the preliminaries have been gone through. These consist in cleaning the body and wearing clean clothes for the purpose of doing *japa*. The Hindu, living in a tropical climate, bathes at least once a day and then wears clean dry clothes set aprt for use before *japa*. If one cannot have a regular bath on any day, one should thoroughly clean onseself. Clothes used for going out, travelling and other purposes should not be put on, but clothes set apart for spiritual practices. A seat such as a small carpet should be kept ready in the meditation room, which should be used only for spiritual disciplines. A spiritual atmosphere can be fostered in the room by burning incense and keeping flowers there. The aspirant takes his seat in a comfortable but erect position, keeping head, neck and chest in a straight line, and quiets his mind. He may or may not do *pranayama* for a few minutes, but he salutes his guru before repeating the *mantra*.

Whatever spiritual disciplines a follower of Vedanta may practise, he seeks a guru and receives from him the *mantra*. He practises it every day of his life until the goal of Illumination is attained.

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A *mantra* or spiritual formula is received from one's guru at the time of what is known as initiation. The guru should be one who is a perfected soul or at least an advanced *sadhaka* (one who has been practising spiritual disciplines). The disciple can recognize such a person by association, if not quickly by intuition. Such a guru accepts his disciple, and goes into a high spiritual mood at the time of initiation. The Divine in him then acts, and the *mantra* given to the disciple is imparted by the Divine in him. This Divine element is the real guru—not his human aspect—and the disciple reverently looks upon the guru as one with the Divine, just as the guru affectionately looks upon his disciple as a young earnest soul aspiring to rise on the ladder of spiritual progress.

It is but natural that the seeker thinks of his guru for a while before doing *japa* of the *mantra*. The science of meditation gives the instruction that he should first meditate in his head on the guru for a short while. He should then merge the guru in his *ishta* (Chosen Ideal) seated in his heart, and begin repeating the *mantra*. Repetition should be silent, but the lips may or may not move. During repetition the aspirant often visualizes his Chosen Ideal vividly, but he should continue repeating the *mantra* a number of times, say a thousand, as such repetition prepares the mind for deeper and deeper meditation. When the repetition is over, he should practise meditation which may have been induced even during repetition.

When an aspirant goes on repeating his *mantra*, he attains in course of time great *sadhana-shakti* (spiritual power arising from his practices) which should be united with *mantra-shakti* (the power of the *mantra*) by intense meditation and faith. It is such union that produces the result of spiritual practices. Of the two powers, the power

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of the *mantra* is greater, though basically they are the same.

Japa, truthfulness and personal purity (continence) are the three factors that contribute more than anything else to success in meditation and spiritual life. Of these factors *japa* is helpful to the practice of truthfulness, as it controls the mind and protects it from going astray. It is also essential for achieving pesonal purity, as it purifies both the conscious and the subconscious mind, and such purification of all the layers of the mind is the *sine qua non* of personal purity. *Mantra* can sink and work in the subconscious: if an aspirant repeats it a few dozen times before sleeping, he will discover that when he gets up from sleep he repeats it, and that during sleep he must have been doing it unconsciously or unknown to himself.

In due course the aspirant realizes that he, his guru and his Chosen Ideal are one and the same in essence.

The Gayatri and pranava (Om)

In ancient times the Indo-Aryans worshipped Brahman as manifest in the effulgence of the sun, in the light of the eye of man, and in his heart, which was considered a centre of consciousness. The *gayatri upasana*—worship of *gayatri*—is the worship of Brahman as manifest in the light of the sun. The Indo-Aryans chose the sun as the supreme source of light and life, as without the sun all life on earth would be extinct and the whole world would be steeped in darkness. The Hindu boy who is initiated into the *gayatri mantra* is taught to direct his attention to the glorious light of the sun at dawn, noon and sunset. He is then taught to think of the life or source of the light in the sun. From this he is led to the life or source of the light of understanding in him without which he cannot see the light of the sun, nor try

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to comprehend the life of that light. In the final stages he is led to the meditation on the identity of the life of the light in him with the life of the light in the sun—the identity of the Pure Consciousness or Atman in him with the Pure Consciousness behind the light of the sun, that is, of the Thing-in-Itself within him with the Thing-in-Itself of the universe. This he ultimately realizes. Indeed, when he realizes the Atman or Soul in him, he finds that the realization of Its identity with Brahman or the Oversoul flashes forth intiutively, just as when a drop or sample of water in any part of the world is found on analysis to consist of oxygen and hydrogen, the knowledge of the composition of *all* water is intuitively gained.

Shri Ramakrishna used to say: 'The Veda loses itself in *gayatri, gayatri* loses itself in *pranava* (Om) and *pranava* loses itself in *samadhi,* the superconscious state.'

Gayatri is a very exalted Vedic prayer. Its meaning is: 'Let us meditate on the glorious effulgence of that Divine Being who has created the three worlds. May He direct our understanding'.[1]

Every time *gayatri mantra* is repeated it should be preceded by the three *vyahritis—bhuh, bhuvah* and *svah*—and these should be preceded by Om. *Bhuh* means the terrestrial or earthly region, *bhuvah* the intermediate or atmospheric region, and *svah* the celestial or heavenly region. They have been created by God, the Divine Power, Saguna Brahman, i.e. Brahman with attributes. The thought of the three regions called *lokas* (worlds) created by God leads one to the thought of God the Creator.

Gayatri is said to lose itself in *pranava* (Om). What

1 *Gayatri mantra* as an exercise in reasoning has been discussed by Sir John Woodroffe in his *Garland of Letters.* Vide Chapter XXX.

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is Om as a sound? Om is made up of three constituent sounds, *A*, *U*, and *M* (in the International Phonetic Alphabet, a, u, m—pronounced as a single syllable). These three represent the three states of consciousness known to every man, woman and child, viz. waking, dream and dreamless sleep. Indeed the three 'worlds' or regions are objective realities, and are known respectively through the three normal states of consciousness—waking, dream and dreamless sleep. Thus from the thought of the three 'worlds' or regions the spiritual aspirant is led to contemplation on his three states of consciousness. This change from the objective reality to subjective states of consciousness is an important process since it constitutes a vital step in seeking the Reality within man. It will be further discussed when we go more deeply into the theoretical part of the subject.

Though Om consists of three constituent sounds, *A*, *U*, *M*, and each of these represents a state of consciousness, Om taken as a whole, as a single sound, is the sound-symbol of the 'Fourth', which is Brahman. In its totality, then, Om is the fittest symbol of Brahman. Man in the waking state, man in the dream state and man in the sleep state are but three modes of expression of one and the same Self or Atman. Hence a sense of self-identity on the subjective side runs through all the three states of consciousness. This sense is not the Self, but gives the clue to the possibility of man's experiencing It as Pure Consciousness, called the *turiya* or Fourth. Strictly speaking it is not a 'state', since it is infinite; but it may loosely be described as the Fourth or Transcendental State.[1] It is this that is the Noumenon behind all phenomena. This is Brahman, the one theme of the Upanishads and the *summum bonum* of life according to Vedanta.

1 *Mandukya Upanishad and Karika.*

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The soundless Om is inherent in the manifested sound Om: so also the *turiya* or Fourth is inherent in all the other three states. All manifested sounds including the sound Om are but expressions of the soundless Om which is inaudible, unmanifested and transcendent: so also the three states of waking, dream and sleep are modes of existence of the one Self.

Brahman, then, is the meaning of Om. It is to this that *gayatri* leads through meditation. So *gayatri* is said to lose itself in *pranava* or Om.

Students often ask whether they should meditate on the three syllables or constituents of Om, that is on A, U and M, in their written forms. Some enquire whether the script should be Sanskrit or English or any other language. Such meditation is not meditation on Om. Meditation on Om is meditation on its meaning—not on the sound Om, not on its constituent sounds, not on the script of any language in which Om may be written, but on the meaning of Om.

To help concentration one should repeat Om a number of times. Indeed the repetition may be done silently throughout the day and night—as constantly as possible.[1] Then comes an awakening, a power comes to the mind, and the mind gets deeply concentrated on the meaning of Om, which in due course is realized in a state of superconsciousness.

Om is therefore the Name of Brahman. It is the nearest possible approach as a sound-symbol to that which is beyond sound and form. It has the profoundest meaning which cannot be expressed by any other sound. It is no wonder that it has been glorified throughout the Vedas.[2]

It must be obvious from the foregoing description of Om and explanation of its meaning that repetition of Om and

1 This is true also of other *mantras*.
2 Vide *Taittiriya Upanisad*, I. 8, for example.

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meditation on its content are an advanced form of spiritual discipline. It is indeed very few who succeed in this form of spiritual practice. The mind must be prepared by other and easier disciplines. Further, though *gayatri* was repeated by the members of the first three clases of the Aryan fold, it was more or less confined to the brahmins of India. On account of their spirit of exclusiveness and the gradual loss of spiritualizing tendencies among the other classes, necessity was felt in course of time for other forms of spiritual disciplines. It was then that the Agamic mantras came into importance and were taught throughout the length and breadth of India.

2. THE THEORY

There are six systems of Hindu philosophy, and these are known as Nyaya and Vaisheshika, Samkhya and Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta). Of these Purva Mimamsa, which is based on the ritualistic portion of the Vedas, may be called the philosophy of ritualism. The teachings of this school are embodied in the form of short aphorisms by Jaimini, their author.

Jaimini holds that the Vedas—not merely their teachings on spiritual laws and principles, but even their very words—are eternal. The words of the Vedas are uncreate, that is, the connection between a word and the object named by it, between sound and sense, is eternal. The perception of sound is doubtless momentary, but sound always is. Its non-perception is due to the absence of the union of the hearer with it. Sound ever exists, but becomes manifest when uttered by man. Says Jaimini, 'Sound is eternal, because it serves to

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convey a meaning. The object denoted by a name always goes with the name'.[1]

In Indian philosophy mind is considered to be subtle matter and made of *akasha,* the first of the five 'elements'. It must be remembered that the mental concept of an object is a modification of mind, and therefore of the same *akasha* of which mind is made. The uttered name of that object is a temporary manifestation of the eternal sound which is a permanent manifestation of the *akasha.* Hence a thought exists permanently attached to its name; the thought and the name rise together in consciousness. This is why the Hindu scriptures call manifestation mere *namarupa* (name and form).[2]

The Indian philosophers considered the study of language an integral part of philosophy. Commenting on this, Max Muller observes in his *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy:*

"They had evidently perceived that language is the only phenomenal form of thought, and that, as human beings possess no means of perceiving the thoughts of others, nay even their own thoughts, except in the form of words, it was the duty of a student of thought to inquire into the nature of words before he approached or analysed the nature of what we mean by thought, naked thought, nay skinned thought, as it has been truly called, when divested of its natural integuments, the word. They understood what even modern philosophers have failed to understand, that there is a difference between *Vorstellung* (presentation or precept) and *Begriff* (concept), and that true thought has to do with conceptual words only, nay, that the two, word and thought, are inseparable, and perish when separated.[3]"

1 *Mimamsa Sutras*, i. 1.18.
2 *Chhand. Up.*, vi. 1.3.
3 p. 402, 1928 ed.

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Sir Oliver Lodge points out the same truth when he says:

"The connection between soul and body, or more generally between spiritual and material, has been illustrated by the connection between the meaning of a sentence and the written or spoken word conveying that meaning. The writing or the speaking may be regarded as an incarnation of the meaning, a mode of stating or exhibiting its essence. As delivered, the sentence must have time relations; it must have a beginning, a middle and an end; it may be repeated, and the same general meaning may be expressed in other words; but the intrinsic meaning of the sentence itself need have no time relations, it may be true *always*, it may exist as an eternal 'now' though it may be perceived and expressed by humanity with varying clearness from time to time.[1]"

Patanjali modified the doctrine of the eternity of sound (*shabda*) by holding that the substance of the Veda is eternal but not the words.

Bhartrihari (seventh century A.D.) expounded the dcotrine of the *sphota*. In his *karika* called *Vakyapadiya* he says: 'Those who know sound know that there are two sounds in the words we speak—one the cause of sound, and the other denoting the object.'[2] This means that one sound exists in the mind before we utter a word, and the second is the uttered word. The potential word which is in our mind is called the *sphota*. This *sphota* is also called Shabda-Brahman or Nada-Brahman. Hiranyagarbha (the Cosmic Mind) first manifested himself as name, and then as form which is this universe. Behind this form there is the eternal inexpressible *sphota*, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, the power through which the Lord creates

1 *Life and Matter*, p. 115,.
2 i. 44.

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the universe; the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *sphota*, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This *sphota* has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is Om.[1]

In the *Rig Veda*, Vagdevi—the goddess of speech, known also as Saraswati—is praised in many hymns. In the Brahmanas she is identified as the sole companion of Hiranyagarbha, who co-operated with him in the evolution of name and form. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* teaches 'His mind entered into union with speech', and identifies her with Aditi.[2] As she represents the power of the *mantras*, she later became identified with the Shakti of the Agamas (known also as the Tantras).

When a word is uttered it conveys a meaning, and this meaning is the object or the idea denoted by the word. When someone hears a word, first it creates a mental apprehension and then the meaning flashes in the mind whether the object is at hand or not, or if an idea is meant it is grasped by the mind.

If this is true of ordinary words, it is also true of divine words or mystic syllables. There is such a thing as the divine word which is the causal stress. This causal stress creates cosmic ideation. A spoken word is but a gross manifestation of the subtle word, and the subtle word is a manifestation of the causal word.

That God speaks the Word and the universe appears as a result of His speaking is a very ancient conception, accepted by all religions except Jainism and Buddhism which deny God. In *Genesis* we find, 'God said: "Let there be light" and there was light'. The divine Word, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, possesses creative power. The

1 Swami Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga*.
2 X. vi. 5.4.

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word preceded creation. The Fourth Gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' The Veda, the oldest extant scripture of the world, says: 'In the beginning was Brahman; second to Him was the Word which was with Him; the Word is Brahman'. The Word is spoken of as second to Him, because it is first potentially in Him, and then as Power issues from Him. The Word is thus the Power of Brahman, which is one with the Possessor of Power.

The transcendental Brahman, or Pure Consciousness is quiescent. In it there is no sound and therefore no meaning and no mental apprehension or cosmic ideation, and therefore no name or form either. In this infinite calm of Brahman a metaphysical point of stress arises, and from this issue forth the myriad forces of this universe. This energizing is the cause of the world process and of the duality of subject and object, of mind and matter. The play of Power (*shakti*) occurs in the consciousness-space (*chidakasha*) in such a manner that this space is neither effaced nor affected when the new condition appears, and this new condition is that of both transcendence and immanence. Through the operation of this Power the homogeneous Unity of Pure Consciousness becomes the diversity of the universe of subject and object: however the Unity does not cease to be such, but only involves Itself in subject and object. This is creation which endures for a cycle, which is only a day of Brahman; afterwards dissolution takes place. In the state of dissolution there are the seeds of future manifestation of creation.

Creation is possible only through an initial movement or vibration in what we in the West call the cosmic stuff and which in Sanskrit is known as *prakriti*. Pure Consciousness is equated with absolute rest and absolute quiescence, but *prakriti* has movement and power. During the

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state of dissolution of the universe *prakriti* is in a state of equilibrium of the three *gunas* (which are both substance and quality) known as *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*. When this state of equilibrium, which is often known as cosmic sleep, is over, *prakriti* begins to move. This movement is the first cosmic vibration in which the equilibrated energy is released, the approximate sound of this movement being the *mantra* Om. The causal stress or vibration is also known as Shabda Brahman.

Duality with all its multifarious varieties is produced by this creation. As consciousness bifurcates into subject and object, mind and matter, these form a parallelism of common origin. Within this subject there is the Thing-in-Itself called the Atman and within the object also there is the Thing-in-Itself. Mind and matter are, therefore, mutually connected by a natural relation. Hence the co-relation between feeling and the object of feeling, perception and the object perceived. Thus sensation and its object are only two aspects of one and the same thing. When an object is perceived with the help of the senses and the mind, there arises in the mind a modification of its substance which is an exact counterpart of the object perceived. This explains why by *japa* (repetition) of *mantra* (spiritual formula), worship and meditation, the mind takes the form of the object of worship and is rendered pure for the time being through the purity and holiness of the divine object, namely the *ishtadevata* (Chosen Ideal), which is its content. By continual practice the mind thinks only of this object to the exclusion of all else, and becomes steady in its purity. This is the purpose of spiritual disciplines.

Mind and Matter

According to Vedanta everything is matter which is not Pure Consciousness or Spirit. When this is associated

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with mind and matter, it is immanent. When the Spirit is clothed with mind and matter in a living thing, say man, it becomes individualized. When it is clothed with cosmic mind and cosmic matter, it is the Cosmic Spirit.

Each of these—both the Cosmic Spirit and the individual soul—has three bodies, causal, subtle and gross. When we are awake, we are in the gross physical body. When we are in a dream state, we are said to be in the subtle body made up of thoughts and feelings. When we are in deep sleep without dream, we are said to be in the causal body which is made of individual *prakriti or maya.* Though man exists in one or the other of these bodies, the individual soul that is in them all is one and the same. The three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep are the three modes of being of the same individual soul. In the waking state it is called *vishva;* in the dream state it is called *taijasa;* and in the sleep state it is called *prajna.*

Corresponding to these three modes of being of the individual soul. there are three modes of the Divine Being, called Virat, Hiranyagarbha and Ishvara (God). The Power of Ishvara is often termed the Power of *prakriti* or Power of *maya.* Thus Virat is the Cosmic Spirit whose body is the entire universe, corresponding to our physical body of which we are aware in our waking state; Hiranyagarbha is the Cosmic Spirit whose body is the mental universe, that is, subtle, made of ideas and feelings, like those of our dream; and Ishavra as the Cosmic Spirit has for His body *prakriti* or Cosmic Nescience, corresponding to the nescience we are in when we sleep, but with this difference, that whereas we are overpowered by individual nescience, God is the controller of nescience,[1] which contains the seeds of future creation.

1 Also known as *maya* in Vedanta and *prakriti* in Samkhya.

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These three bodies of one and the same Cosmic Spirit correspond to our gross, subtle and causal bodies in which we are said to exist when waking, dreaming and sleeping soundly. These bodies, whether they belong to the individual soul or the Cosmic Spirit, are its adjuncts (*upadhis*) which are evolved from the power of *maya* or of *prakriti*.

Mind being a manifestation of *shakti* or Power, translated to the material plane, it is as much a material as is matter itself. Mind is subtle compared to matter, and matter is a dense and gross form of the more subtle and tenuous form (known as *tanmatra*) of the Power of *prakriti* which in the ultimate analysis constitutes both mind and matter, and which is common to both.

Vedanta holds that mind is neither all-pervading nor atomic, but limited and divisible into parts, and thus can take the form of its objects. One part of the mind can attend to something and also to something else at one and the same time. It also can assume the shape of an object perceived and therefore can spread or shrink with it. It pervades our whole body whether we are awake or dreaming, and in deep dreamless sleep it is withdrawn, as is all else, into the causal body.

Matter exists in differing forms of density. Then there is gross matter which is derived from a subtle form (*tanmatra*) of the same, which is not sensed by the gross ear or other senses but mentally apprehended by the yogi. There are subtle objects which may be perceived through the senses or the mind by one who possesses 'powers', these powers being mere extensions of the normal faculty. The 100-inch telescope at Mt. Wilson revealed, it is said, one eighth of space, and the 200-inch telescope at Mt. Palomar can now reveal a quarter of observable space. As we improve our instruments, we see more, but beyond a certain point

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perception takes place not through the senses but through the mind. Everything may be perceived by the mind, except the supreme Self or Spirit. This in Itself is never an object, being beyond mind and speech. The experience of objects becomes more and more subtle until the state of Supreme Experience is attained when there is neither subject nor object. Mind and speech can only hint at it.

The Supreme Sound

Sound exists only where there is movement or vibration. If there is no vibration, there is no sound, and if there is no sound, there cannot be vibration.

The supreme Brahman beyond attributes and activity is beyond sound, but Ishvara (Brahman with Power) is Shabda-Brahman or the Supreme Sound. This is the causal body of sound; *shabda-tanmatra* or the principle of sound is the subtle body of sound, and *akasha* (subtle space) is the gross body of sound (apprehended only through the medium of air, the sound waves in which strike the ear). When the mind is joined to it, the sensation of sound is experienced.

Shabda-tanmatra or the principle of sound, is pure natural sound as apprehended by Hiranyagarbha (Cosmic Mind) and by yogis who share the experience of Hiranyagarbha.

Gross sound is either the sound represented by revealed words (Veda), or the speech of man.

Ishvara (God) directly apprehends all four kinds of sounds—Shabda-Brahman (the Supreme Sound), *shabda-tanmatra* (the subtle principle of sound), Vedic sound and human speech; Hiranyagarbha or Cosmic Mind directly apprehends the last three; *rishis* the last two; and ordinary men the last only.

Now when we deal with apprehension, meaning and sound in their cosmic and individual aspect, we shall see

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that on the Ishvara (God) level, that is, in so far as there is the cosmic causal body, apprehension is the Ishvara (God) Consciousness of His own sheath of Bliss (*anandamaya*)[1] and the cosmic ideation whereby He projects the universe. This cosmic ideation is the Supreme Sound. It evolves into various kinds of lower sounds including *mantras*. Its approximate representation to the *rishi's* ear is 'Om'.

The Veda explains creation in this manner. Regarding the universe as constituted of sound in its causal sense, the Veda says, 'Creation is out of the Supreme Sound'. Using creation in the sense of creative ideation it says that creation is only apprehension. When it speaks in terms of the meaning of the sound, it says, 'Creation is only *artha* (meaning)', i.e. the Supreme Meaning, the cosmic 'stuff' or cosmic 'matter' which is *prakriti-shakti*, Primal Matter-Power.

As God (Ishvara) is conscious of His causal body from which has evolved the universe, He experiences 'I am all'. He experiences Himself as all, whether as a whole, as generals or as particulars. He wills to be many and the elements issue from Him. The creation of these elements according to Vedanta means (1) the evolving of the *tanmatras*, which are infra-sensible, (2), their primary compounds. These primary compounds are either subtle or gross. The subtle ones are the ego, *buddhi* (determining faculty), *manas* (that part of the mind which receives the impressions from the outside world), and *chitta* (mind-stuff) the sub-conscious—which four are known as the internal organs—and the organs of action and the organs of knowledge (nerve-centres in the

1This corresponds to the sheath of bliss in which man is said to exist in deep dreamless sleep. It is so called because such sleep is happy. Man has five sheaths; these can also be considered as three bodies. The sheath of bliss is the same as the causal body in which he remains in deep dreamless sleep.

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brain) and *pranas* (vital energies). The creation of all these implies also their *natural* names. Thus from Om, the sound representing the acoustic aspect of the tendency of potential stress to pass into kinetic stress, are evolved the *natural* names (called *bijas*, literally meaning 'the seed words') of the elements—*hang, yang, rang, vang, lang,* and other *bijas* such as *hring* (the *maya bija* or *pranava* of the differentiating *shakti* or Power).

We are all aware that by using delicate instruments we may hear sounds which are not sensible to the unaided ear. An adept in yoga may hear more. As Sir John Woodroffe aptly points out, if you were to hear the rise of sap in a tree, that sound would be the direct approximate *natural* name of that vegetable function. It is said that in a similar manner, when the *kundalini shakti* pierces the six centres, the yogi can directly apprehend the *bijas Om, hang, yang* and the rest as the passage of *shakti* gradually vitalizes the six centres. By rising to the highest plane a yogi can directly experience any or all kinds of sounds.

In the experience of Brahman or the Absolute the yogi becomes the Brahman Itself when all stress ceases and there is Peace.

Om, the sound of the first creative movement or stress of *prakriti* or *shakti* is the totality of the universe denoted by the creative impulse and also of all sounds. From Om all mantras are derived. From Om were derived all the letters and sounds. It is the approximate representation of the primordial sound

Natural Names

We have already referred to the *natural* name of a moving object, say the rising sap in a tree, or in yogic language the rising of the *kundalini* power in men from the basic centre

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to the higher centres. A *natural* name is, therefore, the sound produced by the generating stress (*shakti* or power) or constituting forces of a thing, not as apprehended by the human ear but by the supreme and infinite ear which apprehends unconditionally sound in itself or as such, without being subject to the varying conditions of time, place or plane, or person. The *natural* name of a thing is that sound which the supreme infinite ear hears. Strictly speaking, this cannot be the *natural* name that man employs, as the latter can only approximate. In this sense even Om is sound only approximately representing the first general stir or vibration of *shakti* or *prakriti*, but the yogi's ear can hear the exact sound: no finite tongue can utter it exactly and no finite ear can hear it perfectly.

According to the science of *mantra* what are known as *bija mantras* (seed-words or root words) approximately represent *natural* names, but when we explain their import or significance, we have to employ words which are not *natural* names at all.

Om, hangsah, swaha, etc., are approximate natural names of fundamental or primary sounds from the Vedas, the revealed scriptures of the Indo-Aryans. *Rang, hring, aing,* etc, are Tantrik *bijas* from the science and literature of the Tantras.

Hangsah represents the causal sound of the function of vital energy (*prana*) as breathing, and is called the *prana-bija*. If we watch the breathing, we shall notice that the outward breath produces the sound represented by *ha* and the indrawn breath by *sa*.

The Supreme Consciousness known as Paramashiva is changeless and enduring from the static transcendental standpoint, but from the kinetic creative aspect (Shiva-Shakti or Shiva with Power) there is a polarization in Consciousness,

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the poles of which are Shiva and Shakti (Consciousness and its Power). Consciousness then identifies itself with the products of its own kinetic Shakti (Power), that is, with mind as the subject of experience and with matter as its object.

The *Prapanchasara Tantra* says: 'The Parabindu divides itself into two parts, of which the right is Purusha (*hang*) and the left is *visargah* (*sah*). *Hangsah* is the union of the Purusha or Consciousness with *prakriti* or matter, and the *hangsah* is the universe'.

Take a Tantrik *bija* like *rang*. It is said to represent the causal stress of fire, as heard by a yogi, which in human language is known as *rang*. The sound accompanying causal stress and the sound which issues forth from something under the action of stimuli are not the same. The latter may be heard, but the causal stress is heard as a sound only by the ear of a yogi. At the time of worship, the worshipper utters *rang* and imagines he is surrounded by a wall of fire which protects him from evil influences from outside.

What are known as *nada* and *bindu* exist in all *bijamantras*. Etymologically, *nada* means sound and is a technical term in the science of *mantra*. It is the more subtle aspect of sound (known as *shabda* in Sanskrit), as the first putting forth of *kriyashakti* (power of will). Supreme *nada* is Supreme Power. It evolves into the *nada* which is the unmanifested seed, or essence, of that which is later manifested as *shabda* (sound). It develops into what is known as *bindu* which is of the same character.

Literally the term *bindu* means a drop or a point such as the *anusvara* breathing. It is a point—not the mathematical point which has no magnitude but has position, but the diffusive with neither magnitude nor position. It is the One in which the Many was implicitly contained, Being and Non-being. Everything and Nothing. It is

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represented diagrammatically by the central indivisible point of the double triangle (*shatkona yantra*;), regarded as the symbol of creation. Sometimes this point is set in a sphere.

Bindu can be conceived by man only as a point, infinitely small and subtle, into which the extended manifested universe is withdrawn. But really it is an aspect of *shakti* or consciousness.

Bijamantras are written with the *bindu* above and the *nada* below.

Each Devata has His or Her own *bija*. The primary *mantra* in the worship of any Deva or Devi is known as the *mula mantra* (literally meaning root *mantra*). Every letter, syllable and *mantra* is then a form of the Brahman and so is the image and so are the lines of the *yantra* and all objects in the universe. All letters are forms of *shakti* as sound-powers. The *shakti* of which they are a manifestation is the living Energy which projects itself into the form of the universe. The *mantra* of a Devata (Deity) *is* the Devata. The rhythmical vibrations of its sounds transform the worshipper by regulating the unsteady vibrations of his sheaths. Through the power of *sadhana* of the worshipper there arises the form of the Devata which the *mantra* is. The meaning of a *bija* is the Devata Itself.[1]

1 For further study the reader may profitably consult *Varnamala* (Garland of Letters) by Sir John Woodroffe (Ganesh & Co., Madras)

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CHAPTER 5

Meditation in Monism

Swami Ghanananda

Every religion has four parts, namely, mythology and ritual, philosophy and higher spiritual disciplines. Of all forms of spiritual disciplines meditation is the highest. In it the approach to the divine goal is made directly by the soul of man, and he ultimately realizes the relationship between the soul and his Maker, and experiences God as the highest Reality. The value of meditation, therefore, is higher than that of ritual as a form of practical spiritual discipline. In studying mythology and philosophy and doing spiritual disciplines like ritual, the thought of God is present in the mind of man. But in meditation this thought becomes deepest and most intense until at last it transcends itself when the highest Illumination is attained.

Many sincere and honest people believe that if they sit down to think of God they will be able to meditate and obtain the fruits of meditation. They think, therefore, that they only need sufficient time to do so. When they are young or in middle age they believe that a day will come after many years when they will be free from the turmoil of work and be able to devote some time every day to the thought of God; but such people generally find it extremely hard in spite of proper guidance and spiritual help. It goes

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to show that only when the mind has been trained in the earlier years of life and has kept up the habit through middle age, will it be able to meditate in the last years of life.

We know that all forms of training, whether physical, for the growth and development of the body, or mental, for the growth and development of the intellect, heart or will, are the outcome of a science. Thus there is the science of meditation, which began to be studied and formulated even from most ancient times by the Indo-Aryans, and which reached the highest excellence unsurpassed among other peoples. Even in the days of the Brahmanas and Samhitas which preceded the age of the Upanishads—those expressions of deepest meditativeness and spiritual experience—the performer of ritual often passed into a state of communion with the Deity. In the Upanishadic period this became deeper and was specially cultivated by those who became the Seers of the Upanishads. The science, therefore, grew and flourished, and though it was in the hands of a few, it was kept alive. In the post-Vedic age we find its greatest teacher, Shri Krishna, teaching his disciple, Arjuna, the way of meditation; and in a subsequent period Kapila and Patanjali developed and expounded the psychological and psychic aspects of meditation. In the post-Buddhistic age Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and others expounded the science of meditation in their commentaries, each in his own way.

Whatever the path a man may find suitable for him to follow, whether it be the path of devotion or that of knowledge, or the path of right action or that of psychic control, meditation is the maturer form of all spiritual practices. A man may hear the teachings of the scriptures and philosophies: he tries to understand and reflect on the truths so taught. But when he practises, meditation forms an impor-

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tant part of his disciplines. Again, when a man does all work in a spirit of dedication his mind slowly but steadily becomes filled with the thought of God to whom he dedicates his work: his consciousness becomes so deeply coloured in the long run, that meditation becomes natural to him. This is true of devotional practices, and also of the psychic and psychological disciplines prescribed by Raja Yoga. Our endeavours to live the spiritual life from the day we began to have an inkling of its nature till the day of Enlightenment, form a series of concentric circles which contract more and more until the Reality called God, which is their centre, is reached.

In Vedanta, meditation is compared by the teacher Ramanuja to the uninterrupted flow of oil from one vessel to another.

Vedanta is studied and practised in three aspects, namely, monistic, qualified-monistic and dualistic. In monistic Vedanta the approach to meditation is similar to that in Samkhya except that in Samkhya they speak of a plurality of souls whereas in monism the ultimate Reality is One. In Samkhya the practical procedure consists in eliminating *prakriti* and its modifications—the body. 'mind' and ego—and arriving at the spiritual consciousness called the Purusha; whereas in Vedanta it consists in denying the *absolute* existence of body, mind and ego, as well as the universe, which are only relatively real, and arriving at the One Absolute Reality called Brahman with which the Self of man, the essence of his being, is identical.

Monistic meditation is meditation on the Absolute. As the Absolute is beyond form and beyond attributes, this type of meditation is the most difficult of all. It is not thinking of mere formlessness such as 'vacant space', the blue sky or the shoreless ocean. This does not constitute meditation on the Absolute. It is only thinking of the

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'material infinity' called *mahakasha* or the universal space. A higher and subtler form of infinity is the 'mental infinity' called *chittakasha* or the space of the mind from which infinite thought-forms arise, as in the dream state. But the true Absolute, the Infinite of monism, is the Spiritual Infinity or the Infinity of the Spirit, called *chidakasha*, the Void beyond all forms and attributes. This is the negation of everything conceivable or expressible and is described in the words, 'not this, nor that', of the Upanishads. This is inconceivably higher than the infinity of the universe and the infinity of the mind, for the universe and the mind are both limited, but the Infinity of the Spirit, the Atman or Brahman, is the true Infinity, the true Absolute of monism.

From the above it must be clear that monistic meditation is bound to prove difficult even in the case of those who have arrived at an intellectual conviction of the identity of the Atman or the Self in man with Brahman or the Oversoul.

Vedanta, therefore, prescribes four forms[1] of preliminary disciplines for monistic aspirants, without undergoing which monistic seekers cannot successfully attempt their meditation. The first and foremost of these is the constant discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Day and night the aspirant is to think of the enduring Real which abides and does not change, and which is, therefore, different from the passing real. He is to discriminate constantly between the Absolute Reality and the relative reality of the universe and its phenomena. Vedanta boldly asserts that not only is the universe with its myriad forms clothed in myriad hues ephemeral, but also the body of man and his mind including his ego. This teaching is based on the experience of the Seers.

1 Vide *Vedantasara* and similar texts.

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Even this discrimination between the Real and the unreal is insufficient to help the seeker in his monistic meditation and help him realize the goal of monism. Man lives in this world, and therefore with a view to protecting his mind from obstacles to the practice of discrimination, three other forms of spiritual disciplines are also enjoined. One of these consists in the practice of the following six virtues:

(a) checking the mind from the pursuit of all objects except hearing the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta;
(b) checking the organs of action and knowledge from all objects except hearing the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta;
(c) keeping the organs so restrained from drifting along their old course to sense objects;
(d) remaining unruffled by pleasure and pain, profit and loss, prosperity and adversity, honour and dishonour, and other pairs of opposites;
(e) constantly concentrating the mind on hearing the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta, and practising such virtues as modesty, humility, devotion, purity and service to the guru;
(f) faith in God; faith in the Upanishads and other teachings of Vedanta; faith in the guru; and faith in one's capacity to realize the Truth.

Practice of the above six virtues constitutes the second form of preliminary disciplines.

A third form consists in the relinquishment of the desire for the fruits of action in this world or in *svarga,* that supernatural world where souls enjoy subtle pleasures and happiness. The monist aims at knowledge, and cares for nothing but knowledge.

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Fourthly and finally the seeker is exhorted to create in himself a divine discontent and a thirst for liberation from the thraldom of body, mind and ego, as well as from nescience, by attaining Illumination.

These disciplines prepare the mind for steadiness in daily meditation on the Atman, the Pure Consciousness in man, and on his identity with the Oversoul or Transcendental Consciousness.

In order to help its students in monistic meditation, Vedanta gives an unchallenged and unchallengeable definition of the Absolute Reality by declaring that It is That which remains unaffected throughout all time—past, present and future. This definition brings the conception of Reality right into the heart of man, as we shall see presently.

With a view to ascertaining the nature of Reality or what It is, the Seers of India first studied objective phenomena. They noted that objects changed with lapse of time. They were once in a subtle state and then in their present condition, and from this they will again change into a subtle state. What is true of individual objects is also true of the universe as a whole. The universe also was once in a subtle state from which it evolved into its present condition, and it will again return to its subtle state in the future. Thus what we see is not a permanent reality. But we should remember that though it may change and change, it never ceases to exist; in other words the notion of existence can never be removed from our minds.

The ancient Seers further found that not only the objective universe but also the observer who saw it changed from time to time. His body and mind change with years. Nay, more, he is not the same during the 24 hours of the day and night. During day he is awake, but enters into quite a different state when he sleeps and begins to dream, and when

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he is in dreamless sleep he is in yet another state which is different from his waking and dream states. It must therefore be clear that not only do the objective phenomena of the universe change, but there is a change also in the subjective counterpart in man.

A study of matter in the objective universe eventually led to the growth and development of science. A study of phenomena as presented to the consciousness of man in the different states of waking, dream and sleep, as well as the study of these three states in relation to the Self of man, contributed to the growth and development of monistic religion and philosophy.

An investigation into the three states of consciousness known to man, viz., waking, dream and sleep, is one of the characteristic features of Vedanta. Vedanta claims that no study of man is complete unless a study of his personality in all three states is attempted. As a result of such study we find that in the waking state the universe appears as real, tangible, perceptible to the five senses. In the dream state the universe becomes thin and attenuated. And in sleep man does not see anything, does not know anything; the universe has entirely disappeared and he is not even aware that he is sleeping; but when he wakes in the morning, he remembers to have slept well or ill as the case may be. Now every act of remembrance is an act of re-cognition. This means that the cognition took place even in sleep without man's knowledge. Who could this cognizer be?

The Upanishads declare that the cognizer in sleep is Consciousness itself. It directly registers sleep without the help of mind and ego, for these do not function in sleep——it registers the fact of sleep just as at night the thermometer records the temperature and the barometer the atmospheric pressure, though we are fast asleep.

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Consciousness is present in our waking and dream states, but it takes the help of the mind and the ego to perceive and know. Mind and ego are its adjuncts in the waking and dream states. In the waking state we are conscious of ourselves, our pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows. We are conscious of these in the dream state also, though the time, space and causation in the dream state are of a standard different from that of the waking state. When I am awake, my identity is felt as such and such. In dream I perceive many things which are not seen in the waking state, and the ego of waking has vanished and another ego has taken its place; yet I know that another person does not dream for me; it is I myself who dream and wake up again. In sleep nothing is perceived and there is neither the ego of dream nor that of waking; yet on waking we all feel and know intuitively the identity of our personality in waking, dream and sleep. Extending the study of consciousness to the period from our birth till old age, we shall find that it was we that were born, it is we that are now living and it is we that will grow old and die.

This notion of the identity and continuity of human personality can arise only when something exists as a background of the stages of life and states of consciousness. This is Pure Consciousness. It is behind the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep, or rather It has three modes of being, called waking, dream and dreamless sleep. It is also behind all the stages of life such as infancy, youth, middle age and old age. Nay, It has been existing eternally throughout our past lives and will exist throughout the future. It is the Atman or the Self, a fact underlying all that is given by experience. 'The Pure Consciousness is that of which the personal consciousness, which is bound up with the activities of body and mind and with which alone man is normally

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acquainted, is a reflection in matter.' Suppose somebody hits me, then I become conscious of pain. This is a state of personal consciousness and is a complex. From it, if I eliminate whatever is contributed by the body and the mind, what remains is the consciousness that accompanies all mental processes, which was first differentiated by Plotinus among Western philosophers and called the accompaniment—*Parakolonthesis*—of the mental activities by the soul. This is the light of Consciousness which manifests in both the mental and physical worlds. 'It is the power of pure intelligence which being unchangeable cannot become the seat of perception, for this latter belongs to the mind.' Thus Pure Consciousness is separate from mental activity. *It is not a mere idea or abstraction but a Reality, indeed the greatest Reality that man can attain.*

This Pure Consciousness is called Purusha by the Samkhya Philosophy and Atman by Vedanta. But for It and Its illuminating power, the power to manifest mental and bodily functions, such functions would go on unconsciously and unknown. Unlike matter, It is immutable, beginningless and endless, a steady shadowless light that knows not any change. It is the immaterial part of man; It is this immortal soul, his deathless Self, the core of his being. Shankara says, 'The Atman is *jna,* Eternal Consciousness, because It is uncreate. Eternal Consciousness is the nature of the Atman just as heat and light are of fire.[1] The moment a seeker will realize It, he will intuitively realize Its identity with the Oversoul, Brahman.

In all the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep the Atman is the witness. *But our goal is to be the Atman with nothing to witness*—the Atman as It is, shining in Its own glory undimmed by its adjuncts.

1Commentary on the *Vedanta Sutras*, II. iii. 18.

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What has been given above is what one can learn by investigating the nature of the three states. The tearing off of the veil of *prakriti* with a view to realizing the Atman and Its identity with Brahman has to be attempted first by meditatng on the Atman and then on Its identity with Brahman, until eventually this identity is realized. If this method is found difficult, one should begin by meditating on God with attributes, and if necessary, on God with form and attributes, and in due course follow the monistic method.

In monism we have a method of meditation which does not want us to accept any theological doctrine or dogma of any particular religion. Its philosophy and its approach are like the air and water, the gift of Mother Nature: they belong to everyone.

Monism accepts all paths and religions, yet rises above them all.

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APPENDIX

About the Guru

Swami Yogeshananda

It may be worthwhile for us, having discovered the meaning and methods of meditation, to consider the nature of the guru, the teacher of this high art, as understood in Hinduism generally and in the Ramakrishna movement particularly. That the word guru has become a part of the English language is apparent from television programmes, cartoons and the titles of new books. But there are many misconceptions and prejudices in the West about gurus, and it is in hope that some of these may be dispelled that we take up the topic here.

Let us presume that from the foregoing essays we have understood what the spiritual problem is, according to Vedanta, and are fairly certain that this cannot be satisfactorily worked out by our own unaided effort. Books, after all can take us a certain distance only; they do not explain everything. When crises come to us in life and put a strain upon us, books cannot give us specific remedies. Reading too much can be confusing. Convinced of the necessity for a guru, we must now discover how to know one when we see him. What should we look for?

Of course anyone can set up shop and call himself a guru. There are as yet no laws, no established churches

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of traditionl mystical practice in the West, which train, spiritual teachers and demand of them particular tests and qualifications. There are many, evidently, who would like to be gurus. In India it is often said, 'Gurus are plentiful; it is disciples who are difficult to find'. A story is told, about the ancient days, that on a certain occasion a young man approached the saintly master of a forest hermitage and asked to become a disciple in the ashrama.

'Do you know', asked the sage, 'what the duties of a disciple are?'

'No, sir,' replied the boy.

'He must get up before dawn and go to that cold stream for his bath. Then he has to draw water for the day's use, start the fire, chop wood for the sacrificial fire and help the cook with the meal. After the meal he gets a little rest. He must then rub my body with oil....' and so it went, on and on, till the boy began to have second thoughts.

'Then, sir, please tell me what are the duties of the guru?'

'The guru?' the old man replied, 'Oh, he has only to meditate and read some Vedic passages, and direct the work of the ashrama a little, have his bath, and the rest of the time he is at leisure.'

'Then please make me a guru!' said the young man. That is it. People think it is easier to be a guru than a disciple. Little do they know.

Let us see what are laid down by the Vedanta scriptures as the traditional qualifications. These are found in the *Mundaka* and *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishads; a summary of them has been made by Shankaracharya in his *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*.

They are four. The guru must be *shrotriya*, versed in the scriptures. This sounds quite natural: if he is to teach a religion he must know what he is to teach. Must

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he then be a scholar, a pandit? When we remember that this has not been true even of the Avatars, we realize that what is meant is the essence of the scriptures—their spirit. Shri Ramakrishna was scarcely able to read or write. It is a fact, however, that he had many books read and quoted to him. There was an astounding intellect and fund of information behind the facade of singing and dancing and prayer to the Divine Mother. To be learned is an additional ornament for a spiritual teacher; we cannot say that it handicaps him, but it is certainly not a requirement. The Holy Mother, Shri Sharada Devi, told a young aspirant to monastic life: 'My boy, finish your college education first; it is not good to be an ignorant monk'. The decline of an order has, in many cases, been the consequence of its abandonment of the intellectual tradition. The spiritual teacher must be able to handle all the types of minds which may come his way, which is why, brilliant in mind or mediocre, he has to keep up the scriptural tradition, and continue his study more or less throughout his life.

Another point in this connection is that the guru should not cut us adrift from our traditions. For example, we should expect a Vedanta teacher who is to work in the West to lead his students to spiritual understanding through a smooth transition. He would seek to strengthen in them their own Christian or Jewish or Humanist aspirations, if any, at the same time putting before them the less familiar truths of Hinduism in terms with which they would feel at home. This does not mean that he would 'water down' or modify the Eastern tradition; it simply means he would not come to them saying, 'Everything you have known before is wrong. Now just sing the name of Rama, or Krishna; He is the only Saviour.' The Oriental who would teach us should know our scriptures in addition to his own.

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The second qualification of the guru is more important than the first. The guru must be *brahmanishtham*, established in Brahman, ever living in God. He must be a man of realization; for if he has not experienced the Truth, how can he carry you and me to the shore beyond ignorance? How will the blind man teach us what sight is? As Swami Vivekananda often reminds us, the spiritual pursuit is not like the study of mathematics or any secular subject, for teaching which the instructor has no particular need of virtue or good character. The subject here is God Himself, Ultimate Truth—how to be one with That in nature, in essence. The guru must therefore be able to show us how to manifest the Divine Being within.

Here two questions arise. If the teacher is always living in Brahman, how does he look upon this world? Not seeing ignorance, how, indeed, can he teach at all? If properly qualified, he has been made a teacher just because he *is* able to look upon the world with an eye of love. He must, to some extent, be aware of distinctions, but if he is illumined, he sees all as God, nonetheless. To him there is guru-Brahman, man-Brahman, animal-Brahman, plant-Brahman, but all are Brahman. Secondly, if we should meet a realized soul, how should we recognize him? The answer to this is that we should tactfully test him in every way that we can, before making any decision to accept him as our lifelong guide. For in India the guru relationship is considered a most sacred one, lasting a lifetime and even beyond. Regarding this question we shall have more to say below. Now let us come to the other two qualifications.

The guru should be *akamahata*, unsmitten by desire, unmotivated by any selfish purpose. This is a big order. We are so accustomed to see selfishness all round us that we do not know even how to look for purity of motive. We

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take it for granted that every individual will have some axe to grind. We shall have to observe the person carefully. If we see in him any hankering for lust or lucre, or any self-propulsion toward name, fame and prestige, we should beware. It is, of course, an internal affair, and difficult to discern. A man's attachment cannot always be discovered from his external manner or circumstances. The great King Janaka of ancient legend, for example, ruled from a throne, surrounded by all the appurtenances of a royal life; yet he was a knower of Brahman, and fully qualified as a teacher of *brahmajnana*. He was totally unattached.

There is a story told of a gentleman who had heard of the holiness of Swami Brahmananda, Shri Ramakrishna's beloved disciple, and President of the Order, and wished to see for himself this saintliness. When he called at the house where Maharaj (as he was known) was staying, he happened to find him engaged in conversation in an inner room, and was asked to have a seat in the anteroom. Through the partially-open door this gentleman could see that the Swami was seated leaning against a bolster, surrounded by fine pillows and looking for all the world like a luxury-loving aristocrat. Surprised enough at this, he began to catch some of the conversation. What was this? It was all about food. Maharaj was waxing enthusiastic about this fish and that dish, about one curry and another and how they should be prepared. Nothing but food. Disgusted and puzzled, the caller thought to himself, 'What holiness is this?' He got up and left the place without meeting the Swami. A brother-disciple of Swami Brahmananda who had seen and understood the whole affair, and knew the measure of Maharaj, remarked to a devotee present, 'What a pity that man did not wait to meet Maharaj; had he done so, all his own attachment to food would have been burnt up in five

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minutes!' We tend to see in others defects we bear in ourselves; the competent guru, as a gardener of souls, uproots these weeds.

But if anyone wants to make us his disciple, for the purpose of dipping his hand in our pocket or riding on our coattails; or for twisting our life to serve some scheme of his own; or in order to pull over our eyes any additional shroud of mystery—let us keep our distance.

The fourth qualification is a twin of the third: the guru is *avrijina*, stainless. Simple he should be, and guileless. How open was Shri Ramakrishna's life! There was nothing concealed there; he could not even keep his cloth properly on his body. He used to say, 'The word "guru" pricks me; I never think of myself as a guru. God is the only guru.' He never put on airs. The teacher must have no sin, no conceit, no deceit: that is the prescription. He should have no deviousness in him. And so in India it is said, we are to examine the prospective teacher 'day and night'. The story often told in illustration of this is that of the boy Yogen, later to be a monastic disciple, who happened to spend the night at the temple garden where Shri Ramakrishna lived, shortly after meeting him for the first time. Yogen was lying awake and noticed that the Master was getting up in the dead of night and walking out in the direction of the next building. He knew that she who was called the Holy Mother stayed in that small building. 'Then does this man, too, secretly visit his wife?' he asked himself. 'Is he only another fraud?' Arising he followed, and hid himself in the shadows to watch. But as Shri Ramakrishna shortly returned, from answering the call of nature, he discovered the boy standing there. 'Oh, hallo,' said he, with no surprise whatever, 'it's you. Good, good! You have done the right thing. Test your guru by day and by night.'

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It is scarcely necessary to say that the spiritual teacher ought to be a renunciate. It is not a question of formal vows, of one's being a monk or nun, although this is surely one indication of the status of the teacher. It is a question of thorough-going renunciation. After all, if a guru owns private property somewhere, has financial investments or is worrying about wife or family, how effective can he be as a teacher of others? There is a view, quite popular just now, that an unmarried person is unfit to guide people who are living a family life. This may be true for the psychiatrist; it is not at all so for the spiritual guide. His task is to give a higher direction to all the animal propensities of men, and for this he requires the instrumentation of his own example. Those who are living wholly in God, as a guru must be, have severed connections with the ordinary life of the flesh. This is the Indian tradition, with centuries of wisdom and experience behind it. If we try to become disciples of one who has not snapped his own attachments, how then, when we reach the higher stages of spiritual development ourselves, will he be able to lead us forward to the goal?

In India of former times the kings would keep a court pandit or counsellor of holy wisdom, just as they would have a court jester. Sometimes the king would be a pious man who took his guru very seriously, and occasionally the latter would be a person of real spiritual eminence. It is said that a certain king, whose guru was expounding to him the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, that in time he grew restive and began truly to hanker for realization. Losing patience with the pedestrian exhortations of his pandit, he challenged him: 'What is this? Do you not know that my great-grandfather got illumination in seven days, from hearing the *Bhagavatam* expounded by his teacher? Here you have been instructing me for months, and what have I realized? If you cannot

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do this for me in one more week, I will not give you further livelihood.' The teacher, who was a householder, went to his home full of anxiety and depression. How was he to enlighten the king within a week? His daughter, coming to know the cause of her father's grief, promised to solve the problem, and set off for the palace next day to see the king. She, quite naturally, told him what the father could not say: 'O king, what you are asking of my father is not fair. The guru of your great-grandfather was a free soul, a man of highest knowledge; this fact is known to all. But my father is a man tied with a hundred bonds of hope and desire; how can he liberate you, being bound himself?'

These, then, are the traditional specifications. In our day and our world, we require certain other considerations as well.

We should first understand that, in writing here about the guru, we are not speaking of the Teacher of teachers, the Divine Incarnation or Avatar. They are, of course, the superlative teachers. If we could get one of them, our spiritual problem would be solved. But perhaps we have been born too late—too late even for the most recent one. The best that we can hope for is to obtain the instruction of someone who has inherited some of the fund of divine knowledge and illumination which has come, into the world with the Avatar, and the power to help us realize something of the same condition ourselves. Every spiritual teacher need not be fully illumined, desirable as this might be; if it were necessary most of mankind would be in utter darkness; we should have to be born just at the time of the rare advent of an Avatar or other God-like man. No. We can get help from many sources, and these are sometimes nearer to us than we think them to be.

This has a bearing on the subject of initiation, which

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should perhaps be discussed also, as it is another Indian practice not well understood abroad.

A very senior and experienced Swami once put it to us in this way: Suppose you wish to go by train from London to, let us say, Edinburgh. Initiation is like getting on an inter-city train with a through-ticket. It will take you to your destination; the tracks run that way. But you must decide to get on the right train. Furthermore, if, when the train slows at York or Newcastle, you jump off for sight-seeing, you may be injured; even if you are not, you will have to catch a later train, and for that you will have to pay. Initiation gives you a key; you must find the keyhole and fit the key to it, turn the lock and open the door. It virtually guarantees you spiritual realization of one kind or another if the teacher has the power; it never deprives you of your freedom to postpone the claiming of that realization, so long as you go on finding this world entertaining. As Shri Ramakrishna says, when the child has tired of his toys he cries for his Mummy. Initiation is the process of indicating to us, lost children as it were, just who our Mummy is—our spiritual Mother—and where She is to be found.

Sometimes people get the idea that by taking initiation from a guru they will be spared all the struggle and difficulty of spiritual practice. This notion may be more prevalent in India than elsewhere. But it is mistaken. The grace of the teacher is a powerful saving force, but certainly the guru will never cheat you of the joy—for it is an unsuspected and enduring joy—of working for your own enlightenment.

Initiation is often said to be of three kinds: *shakti, sambhavi* and *mantra*. In the *shakti* initiation, by his mere will the teacher wakes up the dormant spiritual knowledge in the disciple, giving him full or partial realization then and there. He does not even have to touch him or be near him

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at all. Generally only the Avatar has the power to give this type of initiation—the Avatar and possibly one or two of his intimate companions. In the life of Shri Ramakrishna this ability was seen on various occasions. *Sambhavi* initiation is that in which by a touch or look the teacher 'imparts' spirituality. This, too, is unusual and a faculty only great saints have. An ordinary guru, if he is suddenly raised up to a very high spiritual plane, may also be capable, temporarily of *sambhavi* initiation. All other initiation is by *mantra,* in which the teacher speaks the sacred word into the ear of the disciple, thus planting in his mind, as it were, the seed which will sprout into spiritual unfoldment.

Returning to the question of how to judge a teacher, we should be advised not to look for some preconceived physical manifestation of spiritual magnificence. A long beard, flowing hair and shining eyes make good illustrations for the press, but our need for a guru is not related to this. What do we care what the guru looks like? What has spirituality to do with the body, as a matter of fact? The body of an enlightened soul may be male or female, hale or crippled, and of any size or shape. It is fallacious to suppose that spiritual insight has physical beauty, health or impressiveness as its necessary concomitant. Not that illumination cannot be reflected in the mien, posture and carriage of the teacher; certainly it can, but these subtle evidences are not those ingredients of the 'charisma' so dear to the publicists. One of the greatest spiritual teachers of this century was a woman. She was the widow of Shri Ramakrishna, Shri Sharada Devi by name. Reading her life one has difficulty, initially, in discovering what external characteristics are there, by which we can understand what drew to her the thousands who became her children.

Another preconception which many of us entertain

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is that the guru must be brilliant of intellect. But the teacher of spirituality need not be a shining intellectual. Intellect is a pretender to the throne of Wisdom. Wisdom need not, and often does not manifest itself in the display of intellect. For the functioning of the guru-relationship, the heart is more important than the brain.

Then again, shall we look for a teacher who is a free-lance, so to speak, independent and isolated, or for one who has a tradition behind him and is a member of a spiritual body which supports him and gives him authority? Some people think that the former will give them more freedom and demand less of them in the way of commitment. Such persons misunderstand both the nature of spiritual freedom and the value of commitment. After all, initiation is a kind of inoculation; how do we know that the 'strain' will be a good one? There is a chance that the virus may do harm. Assuredly we should investigate as thoroughly as possible the sponsorship of the person we propose to accept as guru. If we take a guru who is self-appointed we may very well be disappointed. We should ask if he comes from an established and respected tradition based on eternal principles, more than on a particular person or persons. Is he preaching a doctrine which he has developed on his own, by himself? Only a gigantic soul can do that. And if so, what will happen when he has left the scene? What provision does he make for our spiritual guidance in the future? Will we then be left alone? The difficulty about teachers who are detached from any traditional mooring is, that when they float off over the horizon, we are left stranded. Of what use is a pilot ship which disappears after an hour? What we want is a track across this sea of life. These mistakes come from our making the natural error of supposing that the guru is himself the doer, the source. He is not. He is—he should

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be—an instrument in the hand of a Power which works through him, if It finds him fit; for if he is not, that tradition and that Power will abandon him.

These, then, are the traditional and what I may call the contemporary considerations in the selection of the teacher. I use these last words advisedly, because it is also true that we sometimes feel the choice is not in our hands; as Jesus told his disciples, 'You have not chosen me; I have chosen you.' Not infrequently we are told by those who deal with this subject that 'the real guru is within'. That is true. The path to the guru is an internal one, for 'the Light which lighteth every man' is the Guru, and It is within. The teacher in the flesh only prepares the disciple for that day when his own inner Light becomes the guru. In the meantime, however, the wisest course is to seek human help; some will say it is essential. As the writer Shri Krishna Prem explains it, 'only when the wandering mind has been brought into control will it become possible to hear the voice of the guru in the heart.' This early work, he tells us, we can do ourselves, before we find the guru outside, through the practices of which we hear and read. Then, he goes on to say, 'He will begin to hear his guru speaking within him in the voice of conscience. Constantly listening for and obeying that Voice, it will grow clearer day by day and then he will be in a position, when he meets the guru in the flesh, to recognize his voice by its identity with the Voice within.' To some persons this happens quite literally. Instinctively they know the spiritual teacher. It may be something about the way in which he comes into a room and the atmosphere changes; or one sees him in the act of eating, and senses that there is someone else inside him, as it were, receiving the food as an offering; or his voice falls on the ear like some peculiarly soothing celestial music; these, and not dramatic

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demonstrations of psychic powers, are the subtle evidence of the man immersed in divine consciousness. Arjuna asks, in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita:* 'What are the signs, O Krishna, of the man of steady wisdom?' And the Lord replies with the classic description of how such a man walks, sits and so on.

If we are fortunate enough to find such a teacher, then a lofty kind of love can begin to blossom in our heart. Everything that happens between the guru and the disciple, we must know, happens through love. Just as the cow will not 'give down' her milk except to the calf which comes close to her and nudges, so is the guru, too, unable to perform his function without the love of the seeking student. It is said in the Indian religious lore, 'If the disciple is ready, the guru will appear; he will come to us'. The summons is our earnestness.

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GUIDED MEDITATION

Compiled by Swami Ghanananda for use in leading group meditation.

We salute that true Divine Guru, the leader of our souls,

Who is the embodiment of the Bliss of Brahman

And the bestower of supreme happiness;

Who is the Absolute, yet the personification of the highest knowledge;

Who is beyond the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, life and death:

Who is pure and untainted like the sky

And has been indicated by such Vedic teachings as 'That Thou Art';

The One without a second, the eternal, the pure, the immovable;

The witness of all modifications of our mind,

Abiding ever beyond thoughts and attributes.

That alone do we remember; that alone do we worship;

That alone which is the Witness of the universe, do we adore;

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In That alone do we take refuge, which is our sole support, the Self-existent Lord and the only sea-worthy vessel which can take us safely across this sea of life to the haven of peace and bliss.

O Lord, Thou art the embodiment of infinite energy; fill us with energy.

Thou art the embodiment of infinite virility; endow us with virility.

Thou art the embodiment of infinite strength; bestow on us strength.

Thou art the embodiment of infinite power; grant us power.

Thou art the embodiment of infinite courage; inspire us with courage.

Thou art the embodiment of infinite fortitude; steel us with fortitude.

May our bodies become pure;
May we be free from impurity and sin;
May we realize ourselves as the Light Divine.

May our minds become pure;
May we be free from impurity and sin;
May we realize ourselves as the Light Divine.

May our souls become pure;
May we be free from impurity and sin;
May we realize ourselves as the Light Divine.

O Lord, lead us from the unreal to the Real;
Lead us from darkness to Light;
And lead us from death to Immortality.

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May all be freed from dangers.
May all realize what is good.
May all be actuated by noble thoughts.
May all rejoice everywhere.

May all be happy.
May all be free from disease.
May all realize what is good.
May none be subject to misery.

May the wicked become virtuous.
May the virtuous attain tranquillity.
May the tranquil be free from bonds.
May the free make others free.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

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NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF WORDS TRANSLITERATED FROM SANSKRIT

a sounds like *o* in *come*.
ā sounds like *a* in *far*.
i sounds like *i* in *kin*.
ī sounds like *ee* in *feel*.
u sounds like *u* in *full*.
ū sounds like *oo* in *cool*.
r may be pronounced as *ri*.
e sounds almost like *e* in *bed*, but longer; e is always long in Sanskrit.
o sounds like *o* in *note;* o is always long in Sanskrit.
ch sounds like *ch* in *church*.
ṅ (guttural) may be pronounced like *n*.
ñ (palatal) is like French *gn* and may be pronounced like *ny*.
ṇ (cerebral) may be pronounced like *n*.
ṭ and ḍ are hard like *t* and *d* in English.
t and d are soft, somewhat as in French *th* and *dh*.
ś (palatal sibilant) may be pronounced like *sh*.
sh (cerebral sibilant) sounds like *sh* in *shine*.

Such of the remaining consonants as appear in the transliteration sound as in English:

kh, ch, chh, jh, ṭh, ḍh, th, dh, ph, bh, are simple sounds *plus* an aspiration.
ṁ stands for anuswara and sounds like *ng* in *ring*.
ḥ stands for visarga, a voiced breathy sound.
v just after a consonant is pronounced like *w*.

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THE PRINCIPAL SANSKRIT WORDS TRANSLITERATED AND USED IN THIS BOOK ARE GIVEN BELOW WITH DIACRITICAL MARKS

aiṁ
Āgama
ājñā
ākāśa
anāhata
āsana
Ātman
Bhagavad-Gītā
bhakti
bhuḥ
bhuvaḥ
bindu
bīja
Brahman
buddhi
chakra
chitta
deva
devatā
dhāranā
dhyāna
gāyatri
guṇa
haṁ
haṁsa
hṛṁ
iḍā
iṣṭa
Īśvara
japa
karma
laṁ
loka
mahākāśa
manana
manas
maṇipura
mantra
māyā
mūlādhāra
nāda
nāḍi
neti
nididhyāsana
niyama
ojas
padmāsana
pingalā
pitṛ
prājña
prakṛti
prāṇa
praṇava
prāṇāyāma
pratyāhāra
Puruṣa
Rāja Yoga
rajas
raṁ
ṛṣi
sādhaka
sādhu
sahasrāra
samādhi
Sāṁkhya
saṁskāra
sat-chit-ānanda
sattva
śabda
śakti
Śiva
śravaṇa
sphoṭa
sukhāsana
suṣumnā

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svādhisthāna	Tantra	Veda
svaḥ	tejas	Vedānta
svāhā	turiya	viśuddha
taijasa	Upaniṣad	viśva
tamas	upāsanā	yama
tanmātra	vaṃ	yaṃ

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